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NELSON'S ENGLISH SERIES

General Editor—Ernest Bernbaum

REPRESENTATIVE MODERN PLAYS—BRITISH AND AMERICAN

FROM ROBERTSON TO O'NEILL

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REPRESENTATIVE MODERN PLAYS

BRITISH AND AMERICAN

FROM ROBERTSON TO O'NEILL

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

THIS anthology contains plays by Robertson, Gilbert, Wilde, Pinero, Jones, Bennett, Milne, Maugham, Clemence Dane, O'Casey, Fitch, Ade, Crothers, Hughes, Kaufman and Connelly, and O'Neill — ten English and seven American playwrights are represented. The editor regrets that he is unable to include plays by Galsworthy, Barrie, and Shaw. The one act play has been excluded since it is a distinctive art form and has its peculiar technique.

Many difficulties presented themselves in the selection of sixteen representative modern British and American plays. The first problem was, where to begin? Although *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is usually regarded as the beginning of the modern English drama, the importance of Robertson in establishing a tradition of simple realism can not be ignored; consequently *Caste* was chosen as the first play. *Caste* also provides numerous examples of theatricalities which have been abandoned by the later dramatists. From Wilde and Pinero the editor chose *A Woman Of No Importance* and *Iris,* feeling that teachers, especially, would welcome a change from *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* He also felt that the plays chosen are as representative of their authors as those customarily used, and are of equal excellence. (Sir James Matthew Barrie has recently said that *Iris* is the best play written in his lifetime.) As examples of the older problem play *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* by Henry Arthur Jones, was selected; and of the later problem play, *A Bill Of Divorcement,* by Clemence Dane. *The Circle* is included as one of the very best high comedies in the English language, and *Success* as an example of the work of the younger post-war group.

Another problem arose in making a selection from the many excellent Irish plays. Avoiding the one act play and those longer plays that are more generally accessible, the editor finally chose Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock,* which is thoroughly Irish, and hitherto not reprinted in any collection of plays.

As the founder of the "new" American drama, Clyde Fitch can not be ignored, and is represented by *The Climbers,* one of his better plays. *The College Widow,* by George Ade, was included as typical of the better comedy of a quarter of a century ago. Miss Crothers' *Expressing Willie* was chosen to represent the modern American domestic comedy; Hatcher Hughes' *Hell Bent Fer Heaven* as an example of the use of native American material; Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar on Horseback* as a specimen of the expressionistic drama; and Eugene O'Neill's *Diff'rent* as an example of the work of our most eminent playwright.

The short introductions are designed to give the student the background necessary for a satisfactory understanding and appreciation of the plays. The bibliographies are brief and usable. A glossary of dramatic terms has been added, which the editor hopes will assist teacher and student in classroom discussion.

The editor takes pleasure in expressing here his gratitude to Professor Ernest Bernbaum of the University of Illinois, Mr. Frank Lindsay, and Miss Lina Bright for many helpful suggestions; to Sir Arthur Pinero, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. Somerset Maugham, Miss Clemence Dane, Mr. Arnold Bennett, Mr. Sean O'Casey,

Mr. Hatcher Hughes, Mr. George Ade, Mr. George Kaufman, and Miss Rachel Crothers for personal permission to use their plays; and to the publishers as indicated throughout the book for the use of copyrighted material.

R. A. C.

Purdue University
Lafayette, Indiana
January 10, 1929

INTRODUCTION

PRACTICALLY all plays are written for the stage and not for the classroom or study. When reading a play one should always keep in mind this primary consideration: that the lines were written to be spoken on the public stage to the accompaniment of appropriate action and gestures. To one who has confined his reading to fiction, the reading of plays, then, presents certain difficulties. In a novel or short story the author can give directly and simply certain information concerning setting and persons which in the play can be revealed only through the spoken words of the characters. In the older plays one is forced to rely altogether upon dialogue to discover such details as the age and appearance of character, the time of day or year, the lapse of time between scenes, the voice intonation, and the movements about the stage. Most present day dramatists, however, prepare for the reading public editions of their plays containing voluminous stage directions, descriptions of characters and scene, and, occasionally, lengthy prefaces which discuss the possible meaning of the play.

No form of literature, not even poetry or philosophy, requires a more intelligent and imaginative reader than does drama. It will usually be found that a form of entertainment will vary in popularity with the intellectual demand made upon the participant; hence the tremendous vogue of the moving picture in America and the relatively small reading public. In Europe the movies have not as yet supplanted literature, and the average European city has more bookstores than moving picture theatres. Nevertheless, even in America the popularity of the printed play is enormous, practically all plays being published at the time of their first presentation. One recent play has gone into many editions already, and equals in sales most popular fiction of the day. In the larger cities are bookstores which sell only plays and books on the drama. The care with which plays are prepared for the reader, the slight opportunity of the general public to see the plays acted, and the striking world-wide revival of interest in the drama account for the vogue of the printed play.

In spite of the fact that we live in a period of dramatic productivity unequaled in hundreds of years, we in America, paradoxically, have slight opportunity of acquainting ourselves with this drama through its legitimate medium, the stage; consequently, unless we live in a metropolis, we are forced to rely on the printed page for our knowledge of plays and playwrights. As far as art and entertainment are concerned in America, democracy is perniciously successful. The tastes of the majority dictate our amusements, and since most people demand vaudeville and movies, which are often very naïve and childish, much of our entertainment is necessarily unsatisfying. Such a situation can hardly be avoided while the theatre is a purely commercial venture; a man operating a theatre strives to please his public just as does any other business man.

Although the greater part of the American public has only rare opportunities to see dramatic productions of merit on the commercial stage, there never has been a greater and more intelligent interest in the drama than now. Little Theatre groups, resident stock companies, college drama courses, and the wide circulation of published plays, are gradually creating a large audience with critical appreciation. In all European countries (except England) the theatres receive state aid just as schools do; consequently hardly a European community is without

a theatre which presents throughout the year at low prices classic and modern drama of merit. In England and the United States, however, where the quality of public entertainment is dictated by popular demand, on the agencies mentioned above has fallen the duty of keeping alive the enthusiasm for the theatre. Nearly all the larger American cities have Little Theatre groups, many of which possess excellent theatres operated on a sound commercial basis. Summer stock companies of Indianapolis, Buffalo, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and dozens of other cities bring the New York successes (and, fortunately, some of its failures) to the "provinces." The literary level of college dramatics has steadily risen to the point where such old favorites as *What Happened to Jones, A Box of Monkeys,* and *Pollyanna* have disappeared from the repertoire of all self-respecting institutions, and students now do creditable work with Shaw, Barrie, Kelly, O'Neill, Masefield, and the classics.

We are fortunate to be living in one of the greatest periods of dramatic activity; not since the age of Elizabeth have so many excellent playwrights been active as in the past thirty-five years. The Elizabethan age (1588-1625) was a period of unequaled literary activity, and the drama in particular flourished. We are less inclined to worship the contemporaries of Shakespeare than were early nineteenth century enthusiasts who discovered them anew, for we realize that most Elizabethan plays have only an antiquarian interest for us; nearly all of Shakespeare's, however, some of Ben Jonson's (as the New York Theatre Guild's successful revival of *Volpone* well proves), and a few scattered plays of the period maintain an indisputable vitality. With the increase in power of the Puritans in the early seventeenth century came the forcible suppression of the drama, which revived only with the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660, after the barren interlude of the Cromwell government. The half century following the Restoration was a period of great dramatic activity, particularly in the field of high comedy. The scintillating society comedies of Congreve are especially brilliant. In the latter part of the eighteenth century Goldsmith and Sheridan wrote three immortal comedies, *She Stoops to Conquer,* by the former, and *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal,* by Sheridan. These are the only eighteenth century English plays to be seen on the commercial stage today. Then followed an unfruitful century as far as the drama was concerned. Not one good stage play of genuine merit was produced between 1777 and the eighties of the nineteenth century. The poetic plays of Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, and others were not entirely suitable for presentation, and the popular dramas of Lytton and Robertson, although important in stage history, are without much literary merit.

By the eighteen eighties the influence of the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen, founder of the modern drama, began to assert itself in the plays of Pinero and Jones. Jones's *Saints And Sinners* (1884) and Pinero's *The Profligate* (1889), antiquated as they seem today, were the first English dramas to grapple at all candidly with social problems. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) by Pinero is regarded by many as the beginning of the modern English drama. In the early nineties appeared the sparkling comedies of Oscar Wilde, very much like the comedies of the Restoration period in their flashing wit and assaults on conventional morality. Also in the nineties appeared the first plays of George Bernard Shaw, possibly the most significant contemporary English playwright and the greatest satirist since Molière. The early printing of Shaw's stimulating and well prepared plays did much to create an eager audience for the published play. The delightful comedies of Barrie — charming, realistic studies of men and women involved in romantic situations — are among the notable plays of our day. Indifferent to problems, Barrie is interested altogether in humanity, with the result he has endowed the theatre with a group of immortals — Peter Pan, Maggie Shand, Crichton, and

dozens of others, to go down the centuries with Ariel, Falstaff, Tony Lumpkin, and the other imperishable stage folk. The social plays of John Galsworthy constitute one of the most significant contributions to contemporary literature. Although the plays are partly didactic, they are, above all, comedies and tragedies of character: stories of men and women involved in great social forces blind to the needs and mold of the individual. Never since Shakespeare has the English drama boasted of three contemporaneous playwrights of the genius of Shaw, Barrie, and Galsworthy.

John Drinkwater has helped revive interest in the chronicle play, succeeding particularly in *Abraham Lincoln* and *Robert E. Lee;* A. A. Milne has combined realism and phantasy in an original manner; John Masefield has experimented with various dramatic forms, finding his happiest inspiration in the pathetic and beautiful *Tragedy of Nan;* Stanley Houghton, Alfred Sutro, Granville-Barker, Hubert Henry Davies, and St. John Hankin have made our literature rival that of the Restoration Period in its wealth of comedies of manners; and most witty and scintillating of all are Somerset Maugham's drawing room comedies, acidly satiric, brilliant, provocative. Among the younger English playwrights the works of C. K. Munro, Michael Arlen, and Noel Coward bear much promise.

Simultaneously with the new English drama has developed the Irish National Theatre, an independent movement in Ireland designed to raise the Irish theatre to a higher literary level, and to encourage native dramatists to utilize native material. The success of the movement is notable; the Abbey Theatre in Dublin has become a dramatic center comparable to the Moscow Art Theatre and the Reinhardt theatres in Berlin. Among the work of the Irish playwrights that of Lady Gregory, Synge, Lord Dunsany, Yeats, St. John Ervine, and O'Casey is especially meritorious. One of the notable Irish plays is *The Playboy Of The Western World,* which created a veritable sensation when first produced in Dublin. The Irish dramatists have done exceptionally good work with the one act play dealing with peasant life. The spirit of romance and poetry, which is not at all alien to everyday Irish life, permeates the plays giving them a haunting beauty, particularly in language.

The American drama developed late, the first play by an American author to be produced by a professional company being performed in 1767 in Philadelphia. The play was *The Prince Of Parthia* and the author was Thomas Godfrey. The first American comedy to be produced by a professional company was *The Contrast,* by Royall Tyler, acted in 1787 in New York. Because of centuries-long Puritan distrust of the stage, the drama and theatres flourished more vigorously south of New England, particularly in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. By 1830 nearly four hundred plays had been produced in America and by 1860 nearly eight hundred. None of these plays have survived because of intrinsic merit, although they are valuable as historical and social documents. After the Civil War the artistic output of the drama reached an even lower level. Inept comedies, bombastic and noisy melodrama, lavender romances of an incredible sentimentality, were the stage fare for decades.

Then came the eighteen nineties with a dramatic resurgence in America which synchronized with the general reawakening of the drama in Europe. In 1890 Clyde Fitch staged his *Beau Brummel,* and the new American drama was born. In the same year appeared *Alabama* by Augustus Thomas, who with Fitch and Percy Mackaye inaugurated an American drama that has steadily improved until it takes its place side by side with the new European drama. Fitch was the first American dramatist to gain a European reputation, and the first to attempt to portray realistically the American scene. Augustus Thomas, still an important figure in the theatre, for more than forty years has been writing, adapting and

directing plays. His best known plays are *Arizona* (1899), *The Witching Hour* (1907), and *As A Man Thinks* (1911), the latter plays leaning towards a mild didacticism. During the first decade of the twentieth century the most important plays came from the pen of William Vaughn Moody, whose verse plays, though unactable, are of high poetical merit, and whose two prose plays, *The Faith Healer* and *The Great Divide,* were meritorious and successful. *The Great Divide,* with its subtle spiritual implications, is a landmark in American drama. During the same decade the comedies of George Ade scored a tremendous success with their faithful representation of Midwestern small community types; the country yokel, the college student, the politician, the book agent were immediately recognized by enthusiastic audiences wearied with the extravagant horseplay and puerile farce that had so long been offered to them as comedy. Even the vigorous, if unliterary, comedies of George M. Cohan were a decided advance over earlier comedies, for Mr. Cohan has a thorough knowledge of stage values and a broad sense of comedy that lends itself perfectly to farce. The fact that Charles Rann Kennedy, who has a very definite dramatic gift, has used the stage for doctrinal purposes, places his dramas on a lower artistic plane.

The American drama has come into its own within the last few years. American plays find a hearing not only on Broadway, but in Europe as well, especially in London and Berlin. Although America, because of certain fundamental social conditions, will probably never produce a comedy of manners comparable to that of Somerset Maugham and A. A. Milne, it is developing a domestic comedy that is indigenous and authentic. Zoe Akins, James Forbes, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, George Kaufman, Marc Connelly, Owen Davis, Booth Tarkington, George Kelly, Phillip Barry, Rachel Crothers, Jesse Lynch Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Paul Green form a body of playwrights that may bring a pardonable pride to Americans. The racy war comedy of Anderson and Stallings *What Price Glory?* is probably the most satisfactory play dealing with the World War. The domestic comedy of Williams, Kaufman and Connelly, Kelly, and Miss Crothers is penetrating, veracious, and, as all genuine comedy should be, extremely diverting. The bounds of the theatre have been expanded by such adventures into expressionism as Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine,* John Howard Lawson's *Processional,* and Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar On Horseback,* which utilize novelties of form and resort to an often breath-taking subjectivity to throw a revealing light on the complexities of American life.

Of all contemporary American playwrights Eugene O'Neill has achieved the greatest reputation and experimented most widely with various dramatic forms. He has produced a body of plays of unequaled excellence in the American theatre, and has achieved a European repute hardly surpassed by that of any contemporary dramatist. O'Neill is an original artist: he uses the theatre as a vehicle to present the mystery, the beauty, the pain, the futility of life; and to accomplish his purpose he brushes aside all of the old structures of the theatre and builds to suit himself. He already has written more than fifty plays, many of them frankly experimental, a dozen of them commercial successes, and nearly all of them disclosing an acute sense of the complexities of human character and motive, and of the grim realities of life. He has not hesitated to search the lumber room of the theatre for discarded effects and has endowed with new meaning the mask, which is used in *The Great God Brown,* and given to the long despised aside and soliloquy new and vital uses in *Strange Interlude.* Of living playwrights only Luigi Pirandello, author of the highly original *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Right You Are If You Think You Are,* equals O'Neill in sheer inventive genius and the imaginative yet canny application of psychoanalysis to the problems of character and conflict.

The new movement in the drama is not confined to Great Britain and America. Although this volume is concerned only with British and American plays, it is well to remember that an equally great revival in the drama has taken place during the past forty years in France, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Russia, and Hungary. The plays of Brieux, Toller, Strindberg, Andreyev, Molnar, and other Continental playwrights, are of interest and value to every student of the drama.

SELECTED READING LIST

FOR

MODERN BRITISH AND AMERICAN DRAMA

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Playwrights of the New American Theatre. Macmillan, 1925.

Hale, Edward E., *Dramatists of Today.* Holt, 1911.

Moses, M. J., *The American Dramatist.* Little, Brown and Company, 1925.

Quinn, Arthur, *A History of the American Drama, Volume Two.* Harper's, 1927.

THOMAS WILLIAM ROBERTSON

Thomas William Robertson was born in Nottinghamshire in 1829 and died in 1871. His father was an actor-manager and his mother an actress, both connected with various provincial theatres. In the middle of the nineteenth century the English theatre had reached its lowest ebb since the sixteenth century: the stage fare consisted largely of French adaptations and burlesques, pantomimes, and other such trifling stage pieces. Moreover the early Victorians viewed the stage and its folk with a suspicion and prejudice that made exceedingly difficult the restoration of the drama to public favor. Such stage families as the Robertsons and Kendals, however, with their impeccable private life and uniformly unobjectionable theatrical entertainment did much to soften this prejudice.

Although there is some truth in the usual observation that Thomas Robertson received too much stage education and not enough formal schooling to give him a culture and breadth of view necessary for meritorious dramatic work, his eight years in various academies and further years of tutoring under his father afforded him among other things a proficiency in French, which he used to advantage, and qualified him for a teaching position which he held for a short time in Utrecht, Holland. Before he was twenty he had gone up to London to do whatever he could find to do around the theatres. Like other playwrights of his day he translated plays from the French (the French copyright laws had not yet been tightened), and wrote original skits of scant value. Meanwhile he was a student of play production and a keen critic of traditional but often ineffective practices in acting and production.

November 11, 1865, is an important date in the history of the English drama, for it marks the first production of Robertson's comedy *Society,* the play that in many respects inaugurated a new English drama. It does not at all strike us as a work of genius: it is sentimental (the influence of Thackeray is evident here as in all of Robertson's plays), its characterization is scarcely more finely drawn than in any nineteenth century melodrama, and the *exposé* of social injustices and snobberies is, to say the least, naïve. The remarkable thing, however, about *Society,* as well as about *Ours, Caste, School,* and other comedies that followed during the next half a dozen years, was its realism. For the first time a play got away from extravagant rhetoric in dialog and attained a commendable fidelity to everyday life in stage "business." Robertson is the founder of the "teacup and saucer" school of drama, which above all things else brought to the stage a greater naturalness in acting and handling of mere externals of production.

Caste (1867) is Robertson's masterpiece. Victorian to the core in its too simple solution of the problems arising from snobbery and selfishness and in its excessive sentimentalism and mild didacticism, it is realistic enough to triumph over these defects and hold the respect of a more sophisticated age. There is something significant in the opening stage direction: "A window with a *practicable* blind." There is a freshness and naturalness about *Caste* which makes us honor Robertson as an innovator, but we are not blind to the obvious defects of the play. There is little real honesty in the treatment of the problem of caste; there is more than a touch of melodrama in the Marquise and Eccles; and although supposedly dead people return often enough in real life, Robertson does not quite succeed in making George's return credible; and in general the pulling of strings to manipulate the too, too happy ending cannot escape one.

To do Robertson justice we must contrast him, not with the dramatists like Pinero and Jones who followed him, but with the romanticists of the two generations immediately preceding him; then we can realize how successful Robertson was in directing the English drama into a more healthful and stimulating channel.

CASTE
(1867)

BY

T. W. ROBERTSON

CHARACTERS

Hon. George D'Alroy
Captain Hawtree
Eccles
Sam Gerridge
Dixon
Marquise de St. Maur
Esther Eccles
Polly Eccles

Act I: The Little House in Stangate (Courtship)

Act II: The Lodgings in Mayfair (Matrimony)

Act III: The Little House in Stangate (Widowhood)

A lapse of eight months occurs between the first Act and the second, and a lapse of twelve months between the second and the third.

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CASTE

ACT I

SCENE I.—*A plain-set chamber, paper soiled. A window, with practicable blind; street backing and iron railings. Door practicable; when opened showing street door (practicable). Fireplace; two-hinged gas burners on each side of mantelpiece. Sideboard cupboard, cupboard in recess; tea-things: teapot, tea-caddy, tea-tray, etc., on it. Long table, before fire; old piece of carpet and rug down; plain chairs; bookshelf, back; a small table under it with ballet-shoe and skirt on it; bunch of benefit bills hanging under bookshelf. Theatrical printed portraits, framed, hanging about; chimney glass clock; box of lucifers and ornaments on mantelshelf; kettle on hob, and fire laid; doormats on the outside of door. Bureau in lower right-hand corner. Rapping heard at door; the handle is then shaken as curtain rises. The door is unlocked. Enter* GEORGE D'ALROY.

GEORGE D'ALROY. Told you so; the key was left under the mat in case I came. They're not back from rehearsal. [*Hangs up hat on peg near door as* HAWTREE *enters.*] Confound rehearsal! [*Crosses to fireplace.*]

HAWTREE [*back to audience, looking round*]. And this is the fairy's bower!

GEORGE. Yes; and this is the fairy's fireplace; the fire is laid. I'll light it. [*Lights fire with lucifer from mantelpiece.*]

HAWTREE [*turning to* GEORGE]. And this is the abode rendered blessed by her abiding. It is here that she dwells, walks, talks—eats and drinks. Does she eat and drink?

GEORGE. Yes, heartily. I've seen her.

HAWTREE. And you are really spoons! —case of true love—hit—dead.

GEORGE. Right through. Can't live away from her.

[*With elbow on end of mantelpiece, down stage.*]

HAWTREE. Poor old Dal! and you've brought me over the water to—

GEORGE. Stangate.

HAWTREE. Stangate—to see her for the same sort of reason that when a patient is in a dangerous state one doctor calls in another—for a consultation.

GEORGE. Yes. Then the patient dies.

HAWTREE. Tell us all about it—you know I've been away.

[*Sits at table, leg on chair.*]

GEORGE. Well then, eighteen months ago—

HAWTREE. Oh cut that! You told me all about that. You went to a theatre, and saw a girl in a ballet, and you fell in love.

GEORGE. Yes. I found out that she was an amiable, good girl.

HAWTREE. Of course; cut that. We'll credit her with all the virtues and accomplishments.

GEORGE. Who worked hard to support a drunken father.

HAWTREE. Oh! the father's a drunkard, is he? The father does not inherit the daughter's virtues?

GEORGE. No. I hate him.

HAWTREE. Naturally. Quite so! Quite so!

GEORGE. And she—that is, Esther—is very good to her younger sister.

HAWTREE. Younger sister also angelic, amiable, accomplished, etc.?

GEORGE. Um—good enough, but got a temper—large temper. Well, with some difficulty, I got to speak to her. I mean

to Esther. Then I was allowed to see her to her door here.

HAWTREE. I know — pastry-cooks — Richmond dinner — and all that.

GEORGE. You're too fast. Pastry-cooks — yes. Richmond — no. Your knowledge of the world, fifty yards round barracks, misleads you. I saw her nearly every day, and I kept on falling in love — falling and falling, until I thought I should never reach the bottom; then I met you.

HAWTREE. I remember the night when you told me; but I thought it was only an amourette. However, if the fire is a conflagration, subdue it; try dissipation.

GEORGE. I have.

HAWTREE. What success?

GEORGE. None; dissipation brought me bad health and self-contempt, a sick head and a sore heart.

HAWTREE. Foreign travel; absence makes the heart grow [*slight pause*] — stronger. Get leave and cut away.

GEORGE. I did get leave, and I did cut away; and while away I was miserable and a gone-er coon than ever.

HAWTREE. What's to be done?

[*Sits cross-legged on chair, facing* GEORGE.]

GEORGE. Don't know. That's the reason I asked you to come over and see.

HAWTREE. Of course, Dal, you're not such a soft as to think of marriage. You know what your mother is. Either you are going to behave properly, with a proper regard for the world, and all that, you know, or you're going to do the other thing. Now, the question is, what do you mean to do? The girl is a nice girl, no doubt; but as to your making her Mrs. D'Alroy, the thing is out of the question.

GEORGE. Why? What should prevent me?

HAWTREE. Caste! — the inexorable law of caste. The social law, so becoming and so good, that commands like to mate with like, and forbids a giraffe to fall in love with a squirrel.

GEORGE. But my dear Bark —

HAWTREE. My dear Dal, all those marriages of people with common people are all very well in novels and plays on the stage, because the real people don't exist, and have no relatives who exist, and no connections, and so no harm's done, and it's rather interesting to look at; but in real life, with real relations and real mothers and so forth, it's absolute bosh; it's worse — it's utter social and personal annihilation and damnation.

GEORGE. As to my mother, I haven't thought about her.

[*Sits on corner of table.*]

HAWTREE. Of course not. Lovers are so damned selfish; they never think of anybody but themselves.

GEORGE. My father died when I was three years old, and she married again before I was six, and married a Frenchman.

HAWTREE. A nobleman of the most ancient families of France, of equal blood to her own. She obeyed the duties imposed on her by her station and by caste.

GEORGE. Still, it caused a separation and a division between us, and I never see my brother, because he lives abroad. Of course the Marquise de St. Maur is my mother, and I look upon her with a sort of superstitious awe.

[*Moves chair, which he has been twisting about during speech, from table to left corner.*]

HAWTREE. She's a grand Brahmin priestess.

GEORGE. Just so; and I know I'm a fool. Now you're clever, Bark — a little too clever, I think. You're paying your devoirs — that's the correct word, isn't it? — to Lady Florence Carberry, the daughter of a countess. She's above you — you've no title. Is she to forget *her* caste?

HAWTREE. That argument doesn't apply. A man can be no more than a gentleman.

GEORGE.

"True hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood."

HAWTREE. Now, George, if you're going to consider this question from the point of view of poetry, you're off to

No-Man's Land, where I won't follow you.

GEORGE. No gentleman can be ashamed of the woman he loves. No matter what her original station, once his wife he raises her to his rank.

HAWTREE. Yes, he raises her — *her;* but her connections — her relatives. How about them? [ECCLES *enters.*]

ECCLES [*outside*]. Polly! Polly! Polly! [*Enters.*] Why the devil —

[GEORGE *crosses to* HAWTREE, *who rises.* ECCLES *sees them and assumes a deferential manner.*]

ECCLES. Oh, Mr. De-Alroy! I didn't see you, sir. Good afternoon; the same to you, sir, and many on 'em.

[*Puts hat on bureau and comes down.*]

HAWTREE. Who is this?

GEORGE. This is papa.

HAWTREE. Ah!

[*Turns up to bookshelf, scanning* ECCLES *through eyeglass.*]

GEORGE. Miss Eccles and her sister not returned from rehearsal yet?

ECCLES. No, sir, they have not. I expect 'em in directly. I hope you've been quite well since I seen you last, sir?

GEORGE. Quite, thank you; and how have you been, Mr. Eccles?

ECCLES. Well, sir, I have not been the thing at all. My 'elth, sir, and my spirits is both broke. I'm not the man I used to be. I am not accustomed to this sort of thing. I've seen better days, but they are gone — most like forever. It is a melancholy thing, sir, for a man of my time of life to look back on better days that are gone most like forever.

GEORGE. I daresay.

ECCLES. Once proud and prosperous, now poor and lowly. Once master of a shop, I am now, by the pressure of circumstances over which I have no control, driven to seek work and not to find it. Poverty is a dreadful thing, sir, for a man as has once been well off.

GEORGE. I daresay.

ECCLES [*sighing*]. Ah, sir, the poor and lowly is often 'ardly used. What chance has the workingman?

HAWTREE. None when he don't work.

ECCLES. We are all equal in mind and feeling.

GEORGE [*aside*]. I hope not.

ECCLES. I am sorry, gentlemen, that I cannot offer you any refreshment; but luxury and me has long been strangers.

GEORGE. I am very sorry for your misfortunes, Mr. Eccles. [*Looking round at* HAWTREE, *who turns away.*] May I hope that you will allow me to offer you this trifling loan?

[*Giving him half a sovereign.*]

ECCLES. Sir, you're a gentleman. One can tell a real gentleman with half a sov — I mean half an eye — a real gentleman understands the natural emotions of the workingman. Pride, sir, is a thing as should be put down by the strong 'and of pecuniary necessity. There's a friend of mine round the corner as I promised to meet on a little matter of business; so if you will excuse me, sir —

GEORGE. With pleasure.

ECCLES [*going up*]. Sorry to leave you, gentlemen, but —

GEORGE. Don't stay on my account.

HAWTREE. Don't mention it.

ECCLES. Business is business. [*Goes up.*] The girls will be in directly. Good afternoon, gentlemen — good afternoon — [*going out*]. Good afternoon.

[*Exit.*]

[GEORGE *sits in chair, corner of table, right.*]

HAWTREE [*coming down left of table*]. Papa is not nice, but — [*sitting on corner of table down stage*]

> "True hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood."

Poor George! I wonder what your mamma — the Most Noble the Marquise de St. Maur — would think of Papa Eccles. Come, Dal, allow that there *is something* in caste. Conceive that dirty ruffian — that rinsing of stale beer — that walking tap-room, for a father-in-law. Take a spin to Central America. Forget her.

GEORGE. Can't.

HAWTREE. You'll be wretched and miserable with her.

GEORGE. I'd rather be wretched with her than miserable without her. [HAW-

TREE *takes out cigar case.*] Don't smoke here!

HAWTREE. Why not?

GEORGE. She'll be coming in directly.

HAWTREE. I don't think she'd mind.

GEORGE. I should. Do you smoke before Lady Florence Carberry?

HAWTREE [*closing case*]. Ha! You're suffering from a fit of the morals.

GEORGE. What's that?

HAWTREE. The morals is a disease, like the measles, that attacks the young and innocent.

GEORGE [*with temper*]. You talk like Mephistopheles, without the cleverness.

[*Goes up to window and looks at watch.*]

HAWTREE [*arranging cravat at glass*]. I don't pretend to be a particularly good sort of fellow, nor a particularly bad sort of fellow. I suppose I'm about the average standard sort of thing, and I don't like to see a friend go down hill to the devil while I can put the drag on. [*Turning, with back to fire.*] Here is a girl of very humble station — poor, and all that, with a drunken father, who evidently doesn't care how he gets money, so long as he don't work for it. Marriage! Pah! Couldn't the thing be arranged?

GEORGE. Hawtree, cut that! [*At window.*] She's here!

[*Goes to door and opens it.*]

[*Enter* ESTHER.]

GEORGE [*flurried at sight of her*]. Good morning. I got here before you, you see.

ESTHER. Good morning.

[*Sees* HAWTREE — *slight pause, in which* HAWTREE *has removed his hat.*]

GEORGE. I've taken the liberty — I hope you won't be angry — of asking you to let me present a friend of mine to you; Miss Eccles — Captain Hawtree.

[HAWTREE *bows.* GEORGE *assists* ESTHER *in taking off bonnet and shawl.*]

HAWTREE [*aside*]. Pretty.

ESTHER [*aside*]. Thinks too much of himself.

GEORGE [*hangs up bonnet and shawl on pegs*]. You've had a late rehearsal. Where's Polly?

ESTHER. She stayed behind to buy something.

[*Enter* POLLY.]

POLLY [*head through door*]. How de do, Mr. D'Alroy? Oh! I'm tired to death. Kept at rehearsal by an old fool of a stage manager. But stage managers are always old fools — except when they are young. We shan't have time for any dinner, so I've brought something for tea.

ESTHER. What is it?

POLLY. Ham. [*Showing ham in paper,* ESTHER *sits right, at window. Crossing. Seeing* HAWTREE.] Oh! I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't see you.

GEORGE. A friend of mine, Mary. Captain Hawtree — Miss Mary Eccles.

[GEORGE *sits at window.* POLLY *bows very low, to left, to right, and to front, half burlesquely, to* HAWTREE.]

HAWTREE. Charmed.

POLLY [*aside*]. What a swell! Got nice teeth, and he knows it. [*Aloud.*] How quiet we all are; let's talk about something.

[*Hangs up her hat. She crosses to fire round table, front.* HAWTREE *crosses and places hat on bureau.*]

ESTHER. What can we talk about?

POLLY. Anything. Ham. Mr. D'Alroy, do you like ham?

GEORGE. I adore her — [POLLY *titters.*] — I mean I adore it.

POLLY [*to* HAWTREE, *who has crossed to table watching* POLLY *undo paper containing ham. She turns the plate on top of the ham still in the paper, then throws the paper aside and triumphantly brings the plate under* HAWTREE'S *nose,* HAWTREE *giving a little start back.*] Do you like ham, sir? [*Very tragically.*]

HAWTREE. Yes.

POLLY. Now that is very strange. I should have thought you'd have been above ham. [*Getting tea-tray.*]

HAWTREE. May one ask why?

POLLY. You look above it. You look quite equal to tongue — glazed. [*Laugh-*

ing.] Mr. D'Alroy is here so often that he knows our ways.

[*Getting tea-things from sideboard and placing them on table.*]

HAWTREE. I like everything that is piquant and fresh, and pretty and agreeable.

POLLY [*laying table all the time for tea*]. Ah! you mean that for me. [*Curtsying.*] Oh! [*Sings.*] Tra, la, la, la, la, la. [*Flourishes cup in his face; he retreats a step.*] Now I must put the kettle on. [GEORGE *and* ESTHER *are at window.*] Esther never does any work when Mr. D'Alroy is here. They're spooning; ugly word, spooning, isn't it? — reminds one of red-currant jam. By the bye, love *is* very like red-currant jam — at the first taste sweet, and afterwards shuddery. Do you ever spoon?

HAWTREE [*leaning across table*]. I should like to do so at this moment.

POLLY. I daresay you would. No, you're too grand for me. You want taking down a peg — I mean a foot. Let's see — what are you — a corporal?

HAWTREE. Captain.

POLLY. I prefer a corporal. See here. Let's change about. You be corporal — it'll do you good, and I'll be "my lady."

HAWTREE. Pleasure.

POLLY. You must call me "my lady," though, or you shan't have any ham.

HAWTREE. Certainly, "my lady"; but I cannot accept your hospitality, for I'm engaged to dine.

POLLY. At what time?

HAWTREE. Seven.

POLLY. Seven! Why, that's half-past tea-time. Now, Corporal, you must wait on me.

HAWTREE. As the pages did of old.

POLLY. "My lady."

HAWTREE. "My lady."

POLLY. Here's the kettle, Corporal.

[*Holding out kettle at arm's length.* HAWTREE *looks at it through eye-glass.*]

HAWTREE. Very nice kettle.

POLLY. Take it into the back kitchen.

HAWTREE. Eh!

POLLY. Oh, I'm coming too.

HAWTREE. Ah! that alters the case.

[*He takes out handkerchief and then takes hold of kettle — crosses as* GEORGE *rises and comes down, slapping* HAWTREE *on back.* HAWTREE *immediately places kettle on the floor.* POLLY *throws herself into chair by fireside up stage, and roars with laughter.* GEORGE *and* ESTHER *laugh.*]

GEORGE. What are you about?

HAWTREE. I'm about to fill the kettle.

ESTHER [*going to* POLLY]. Mind what you are doing, Polly. What will Sam say?

POLLY. Whatever Sam chooses. What the sweetheart can't see the husband can't grieve at. Now then — Corporal!

HAWTREE. "My lady!"

[*Takes up kettle.*]

POLLY. Attention! Forward! March! and mind the soot don't drop upon your trousers.

[*Exeunt* POLLY *and* HAWTREE, HAWTREE *first.*]

ESTHER. What a girl it is — all spirits! The worst is that it is so easy to mistake her.

GEORGE. And so easy to find out your mistake. [*They cross down stage,* ESTHER *first.*] But why won't you let me present you with a piano?

[*Following* ESTHER.]

ESTHER. I don't want one.

GEORGE. You said you were fond of playing.

ESTHER. We may be fond of many things without having them. [*Leaning against end of table. Taking out letter.*] Now here is a gentleman says he is attached to me.

GEORGE [*jealous*]. May I know his name?

ESTHER. What for? It would be useless, as his solicitations —

[*Throws letter into fire.*]

GEORGE. I lit that fire.

ESTHER. Then burn these, too. [GEORGE *crosses to fire.*] No, not that. [*Taking one back.*] I must keep that; burn the others.

[GEORGE *throws letters on fire, crosses back of table quickly — takes hat from peg and goes to door as if leaving hurriedly.* ESTHER *takes chair from table and goes to center of*

stage with it, noticing GEORGE's *manner.* GEORGE *hesitates at door. Shuts it quickly, hangs his hat up again, and comes down to back of chair in which* ESTHER *has seated herself.*]

GEORGE. Who is that from?

ESTHER. Why do you wish to know?

GEORGE. Because I love you, and I don't think you love me, and I fear a rival.

ESTHER. You have none.

GEORGE. I know you have so many admirers.

ESTHER. They're nothing to me.

GEORGE. Not one?

ESTHER. No. They're admirers, but there's not a husband among them.

GEORGE. Not the writer of that letter?

ESTHER [*coquettishly*]. Oh, I like him very much.

GEORGE [*sighing*]. Ah!

ESTHER. And I'm very fond of this letter.

GEORGE. Then, Esther, you don't care for me.

ESTHER. Don't I? How do you know?

GEORGE. Because you won't let me read that letter.

ESTHER. It won't please you if you see it.

GEORGE. I daresay not. That's just the reason that I want to. You won't?

ESTHER [*hesitates*]. I will. There! [*Giving it to him.*]

GEORGE [*reads*]. "Dear Madam."

ESTHER. That's tender, isn't it?

GEORGE. "The terms are four pounds — your dresses to be found. For eight weeks certain, and longer if you should suit. [*In astonishment.*] I cannot close the engagement until the return of my partner. I expect him back to-day, and I will write you as soon as I have seen him. Yours very," etc. Four pounds — find dresses. What does this mean?

ESTHER. It means that they want a Columbine for the Pantomime at Manchester, and I think I shall get the engagement.

GEORGE. Manchester; then you'll leave London?

ESTHER. I must. [*Pathetically.*] You see this little house is on my shoulders. Polly only earns eighteen shillings a week, and father has been out of work a long, long time. I make the bread here, and it's hard to make sometimes. I've been mistress of this place, and forced to think ever since my mother died, and I was eight years old. Four pounds a week is a large sum, and I can save out of it.

[*This speech is not to be spoken in a tone implying hardship.*]

GEORGE. But you'll go away, and I shan't see you.

ESTHER. P'raps it will be for the best. [*Rises and crosses.*] What future is there for us? You're a man of rank, and I am a poor girl who gets her living by dancing. It would have been better that we had never met.

GEORGE. No.

ESTHER. Yes, it would, for I'm afraid that —

GEORGE. You love me?

ESTHER. I don't know. I'm not sure; but I think I do.

[*Stops and turns half-face to* GEORGE.]

GEORGE [*trying to seize her hand*]. Esther!

ESTHER. No. Think of the difference of our stations.

GEORGE. That's what Hawtree says! Caste! caste! curse caste! [*Goes up.*]

ESTHER. If I go to Manchester it will be for the best. We must both try to forget each other.

GEORGE [*comes down by table*]. Forget you! no, Esther; let me —

[*Seizing her hand.*]

POLLY [*without*]. Mind what you're about. Oh, dear! oh, dear!

[GEORGE *and* ESTHER *sit in window seat. Enter* POLLY *and* HAWTREE.]

POLLY. You nasty, great clumsy corporal, you've spilt the water all over my frock. Oh, dear! [*Coming down.* HAWTREE *puts kettle on ham on table.*] Take it off the ham! [HAWTREE *then places it on the mantelpiece.*] No, no! put it in the fireplace. [HAWTREE *does so.*] You've spoilt my frock. [*Sitting.*]

HAWTREE. Allow me to offer you a new one. [*Crossing.*]

POLLY. No, I won't. You'll be calling

to see how it looks when it's on. Haven't you got a handkerchief?

HAWTREE. Yes.

POLLY. Then wipe it dry.

[HAWTREE *bends almost on one knee, and wipes dress. Enter* SAM, *whistling. Throws cap into* HAWTREE'S *hat on drawers.*]

SAM [*sulkily*]. Arternoon — yer didn't hear me knock! — the door was open. I'm afraid I intrude.

POLLY. No, you don't. We're glad to see you if you've got a handkerchief. Help to wipe this dry.

[SAM *pulls out handkerchief from slop, and dropping on one knee snatches skirt of dress from* HAWTREE, *who looks up surprised.*]

HAWTREE. I'm very sorry. [*Rising.*] I beg your pardon.

[*Business;* SAM *stares* HAWTREE *out.*]

POLLY. It won't spoil it.

SAM. The stain won't come out.

[*Rising.*]

POLLY. It's only water.

SAM [*to* ESTHER]. Arternoon, Miss Eccles. [*To* GEORGE.] Arternoon, sir! [POLLY *rises. To* POLLY.] Who's the other swell?

POLLY. I'll introduce you. Captain Hawtree — Mr. Samuel Gerridge.

HAWTREE. Charmed, I'm sure. [*Staring at* SAM *through eyeglass.* SAM *acknowledges* HAWTREE'S *recognition by a "chuck" of the head over left shoulder;* HAWTREE *goes up to* GEORGE.] Who's this?

GEORGE. Polly's sweetheart.

HAWTREE. Oh! Now if I can be of no further assistance, I'll go. [*Comes over back down to drawers.*]

POLLY. Going, Corporal?

HAWTREE. Yaas! [*Business: taking up hat and stick from bureau he sees* SAM'S *cap. He picks it out carefully, and coming down stage examines it as a curiosity, drops it on the floor, and pushes it away with his stick, at the same time moving backwards, causing him to bump against* SAM, *who turns round savagely.*] I beg your pardon. [*Crossing up stage.*] George, will you — [GEORGE *takes no notice.*] Will you — ?

GEORGE. What?

HAWTREE. Go with me?

GEORGE. Go? No!

HAWTREE [*coming down to* POLLY]. Then, Miss Eccles — I mean "my lady."

[*Shaking hands and going; as he backs away bumps against* SAM, *and business repeated,* HAWTREE *close to door keeping his eye on* SAM, *who has shown signs of anger.*]

POLLY. Goodby, Corporal!

HAWTREE [*at door*]. Goodby! Good afternoon, Mr. — Mr. — er — Pardon me.

SAM [*with constrained rage*]. Gerridge, sir — Gerridge.

HAWTREE [*as if remembering name*]. Ah! Gerridge. Good-day.

[*Exit.*]

SAM [*turning to* POLLY *in awful rage*]. Who's that fool? Who's that long idiot?

POLLY. I told you; Captain Hawtree.

SAM. What's 'e want 'ere?

POLLY. He's a friend of Mr. D'Alroy's.

SAM. Ugh! Isn't one of 'em enough!

POLLY. What do you mean?

SAM. For the neighbors to talk about. Who's he after?

POLLY. What do you mean by after? You're forgetting yourself, I think.

SAM. No, I'm not forgetting myself — I'm remembering you. What can a long fool of a swell dressed up to the nines within an inch of his life want with two girls of your class? Look at the difference of your stations! 'E don't come 'ere after any good.

[*During the speech,* ESTHER *crosses to fire and sits before it in a low chair.* GEORGE *follows her and sits on her left.*]

POLLY. Samuel!

SAM. I mean what I say. People should stick to their own class. Life's a railway journey, and mankind's a passenger — first class, second class, third class. Any person found riding in a superior class to that for which he has taken his ticket will be removed at the first station stopped at, according to the by-laws of the company.

POLLY. You're giving yourself nice airs! What business is it of yours who comes here? Who are you?

SAM. I'm a mechanic.

POLLY. That's evident.

SAM. I ain't ashamed of it. I'm not ashamed of my paper cap.

POLLY. Why should you be? I daresay Captain Hawtree isn't ashamed of his fourteen-and-sixpenny gossamer.

SAM. You think a deal of him 'cos he's a captain. Why did he call you "my lady"?

POLLY. Because he treated me as one. I wish you'd make the same mistake.

SAM. Ugh!

[SAM *goes angrily to bureau.* POLLY *bounces up stage, and sits in window seat.*]

ESTHER [*sitting with* GEORGE, *tête-a-tête, by fire*]. But we must listen to reason.

GEORGE. I hate reason!

ESTHER. I wonder what it means?

GEORGE. Everything disagreeable. When people talk unpleasantly, they always say, "Listen to reason."

SAM [*turning round*]. What will the neighbors say?

POLLY. I don't care!

[*Coming down.*]

SAM. What will the neighbors *think?*

POLLY. They can't think. They're like you; they've not been educated up to it.

SAM. It all comes of your being on the stage. [*Going to* POLLY.]

POLLY. It all comes of your not understanding the stage or anything else — but putty. Now, if you were a gentleman —

SAM. Why then, of course, I should make up to a lady.

POLLY. Ugh!

[POLLY *flings herself into chair by table.*]

GEORGE. Reason's an idiot. Two and two are four, and twelve are fifteen, and eight are twenty. That's reason!

SAM [*turning to* POLLY]. Painting your cheeks!

POLLY [*rising*]. Better paint our *cheeks* than paint *nasty old doors* as you do. How can you understand art? You're only a mechanic! You're not a professional! You're in trade. You are not of the same station as we are. When the manager speaks to you, you touch your hat, and say, "Yes, sir," because he's your superior.

[*Snaps fingers under* SAM'S *nose.*]

GEORGE. When people love, there's no such thing as money — it don't exist.

ESTHER. Yes, it does.

GEORGE. Then it oughtn't to.

SAM. The manager employs me same as he does you. Payment is good anywhere and everywhere. Whatever's commercial is right.

POLLY. Actors are not like mechanics. They wear cloth coats, and not fustian jackets.

SAM [*sneeringly in* POLLY'S *face*]. I despise play actors.

POLLY. I despise mechanics.

[POLLY *slaps his face.*]

GEORGE. I never think of anything else but you.

ESTHER. Really?

SAM [*goes to bureau, misses cap, looks around, sees it on floor, picks it up angrily, and comes to* POLLY, *who is sitting by the table*]. I won't stay here to be insulted. [*Putting on cap.*]

POLLY. Nobody wants you to stay. Go! Go! Go!

SAM. I will go. Goodby, Miss Mary Eccles. [*Goes off and returns quickly.*] I shan't came here again!

[*At door half-open.*]

POLLY. Don't! Good riddance to bad rubbish.

SAM [*rushing down stage to* POLLY]. You can go to your *captain!*

POLLY. And you to your *putty.*

[SAM *throws his cap down and kicks it — then goes up stage and picks it up.* POLLY *turns and rises, leaning against table, facing him, crosses to door, and locks it.* SAM, *hearing click of lock, turns quickly*].

ESTHER. And shall you always love me as you do now?

GEORGE. More.

POLLY. Now you *shan't* go. [*Locking door, taking out key, which she pockets, and placing her back against door.*] Nyer! Now I'll just show you my power. Nyer!

SAM. *Miss Mary* Eccles, let me out!

[*Advancing to door.*]

POLLY. *Mr.* Samuel Gerridge, I shan't! [SAM *turns away.*]

ESTHER. Now you two. [*Postman's knock.*] The postman!

SAM. Now you must let me out. You must unlock the door.

POLLY. No, I needn't. [*Opens window, looking out.*] Here — postman. [*Takes letter from postman at window.*] Thank you. [*Business: flicks* SAM *in the face with letter.*] For you, Esther!

ESTHER [*rising*]. For me?

POLLY. Yes.

[*Gives it to her, and closes window, and returns to door triumphantly.* SAM *goes to window*].

ESTHER [*going down*]. From Manchester!

GEORGE. Manchester?

[*Coming down back of* ESTHER.]

ESTHER [*reading*]. I've got the engagement — four pounds a week.

GEORGE [*placing his arm around her*]. You shan't go. Esther — stay — be my wife!

ESTHER. But the world — your world?

GEORGE. Hang the world! You're my world. Stay with your husband, *Mrs. George D'Alroy.*

[*During this* POLLY *has been dancing up and down in front of the door.*]

SAM. I *will* go out!

[*Turning with sudden determination.*]

POLLY. You can't, and you shan't!

SAM. I can — I will!

[*Opens window and jumps out.*]

POLLY [*frightened*]. He's hurt himself. Sam — Sam — dear Sam!

[*Running to window.* SAM *appears at window.* POLLY *slaps his face and shuts window down violently.*]

POLLY. Nyer!

[*During this* GEORGE *has kissed* ESTHER.]

GEORGE. My wife!

[*The handle of the door is heard to rattle; then the door is shaken violently.* ESTHER *crosses to door; finding it locked, turns to* POLLY *sitting in window seat, who gives her the key.* ESTHER *then opens the door.* ECCLES *reels in, very drunk, and clings to the corner of the bureau for support.* GEORGE *stands pulling his mustache.* ESTHER, *a little way up, looking with shame first at her father, then at* GEORGE. POLLY *sitting in window recess.*]

ACT II

SCENE I.—*D'Alroy's lodgings in Mayfair. A set chamber. Folding-doors opening on to drawing-room. Door on the right. Two windows, with muslin curtains. Loo-table. Sofa above piano. Two easy-chairs, on each side of table. Dessert — claret in jug; two wineglasses half full. Box of cigarettes, vase of flowers, embroidered slipper on canvas, and small basket of colored wools, all on table. Footstool by easy-chair. Ornamental gilt workbasket on stand in window. Easy-chair. Piano. Mahogany-stained easel with oil-painting of D'Alroy in full dragoon regimentals. Davenport with vase of flowers on it; a chair on each side; a water-color drawing over it, and on each side of room. Half moonlight through window.*

[ESTHER *and* GEORGE *discovered.* ESTHER *at window. When curtain has risen she comes down slowly to chair right of table, and* GEORGE *sitting in easy-chair left of table.* GEORGE *has his uniform trousers and spurs on.*]

ESTHER. George, dear, you seem out of spirits.

GEORGE [*smoking cigarette*]. Not at all, dear, not at all. [*Rallying.*]

ESTHER. Then why don't you talk?

GEORGE. I've nothing to say.

ESTHER. That's no reason.

GEORGE. I can't talk about nothing.

ESTHER. Yes, you can; you often do. [*Crossing round back of table and caressing him.*] You used to do so before we were married.

GEORGE. No, I didn't. I talked about you, and my love for you. D'ye call that nothing?

ESTHER [*sitting on stool left of* GEORGE]. How long have we been mar-

ried, dear? Let me see; six months yesterday. [*Dreamily.*] It hardly seems a week; it almost seems a dream.

GEORGE [*putting his arm around her*]. Awfully jolly dream. Don't let us wake up. [*Aside and recovering himself.*] How ever shall I tell her?

ESTHER. And when I married you I was twenty-two, wasn't I?

GEORGE. Yes, dear; but then, you know, you must have been some age or other.

ESTHER. No; but to think I lived two and twenty years without knowing you!

GEORGE. What of it, dear?

ESTHER. It seems such a dreadful waste of time.

GEORGE. So it was — awful.

ESTHER. Do you remember our first meeting? Then I was in the ballet.

GEORGE. Yes; now you're in the heavies.

ESTHER. Then I was in the front rank — now I am of high rank — the Honorable Mrs. George D'Alroy. You promoted me to be your wife.

GEORGE. No, dear, you promoted me to be your husband.

ESTHER. And now I'm one of the aristocracy; ain't I?

GEORGE. Yes, dear; I suppose that we may consider ourselves —

ESTHER. Tell me, George; are you quite sure that you are proud of your poor little humble wife?

GEORGE. Proud of you! Proud as the winner of the Derby.

ESTHER. Wouldn't you have loved me better if I'd been a lady?

GEORGE. You *are* a lady — you're my wife.

ESTHER. What will your mamma say when she knows of our marriage? I quite tremble at the thought of meeting her.

GEORGE. So do I. Luckily she's in Rome.

ESTHER. Do you know, George, I should like to be married all over again.

GEORGE. Not to anybody else, I hope?

ESTHER. My darling!

GEORGE. But why over again? Why?

ESTHER. Our courtship was so beautiful. It was like in a novel from the library, only better. You, a fine, rich, high-born gentleman, coming to our humble little house to court poor me. Do you remember the ballet you first saw me in? That was at Covent Garden. *Jeanne la.Folle; or The Return of the Soldier.* [*Goes up to piano.*] Don't you remember the dance?

[*Plays a quick movement.*]

GEORGE. Esther, how came you to learn to play the piano? Did you teach yourself?

ESTHER. Yes. [*Turning on music-stool.*] So did Polly. We can only just touch the notes to amuse ourselves.

GEORGE. How was it?

ESTHER. I've told you so often.

[*Rises and sits on stool at* GEORGE's *feet.*]

GEORGE. Tell me again. I'm like the children — I like to hear what I know already.

ESTHER. Well, then, mother died when I was quite young. I can only just remember her. Polly was an infant; so I had to be Polly's mother. Father—who is a very eccentric man [GEORGE *sighs deeply* — ESTHER *notices it and goes on rapidly — all to be simultaneous in action*] but a very good one when you know him—did not take much notice of us, and we got on as we could. We used to let the first floor, and a lodger took it — Herr Griffenhaagen. He was a ballet master at the Opera. He took a fancy to me, and asked me if I should like to learn to dance, and I told him father couldn't afford to pay for my tuition; and he said that [*imitation*] he did not vant bayment, but dat he would teach me for noding, for he had taken a fancy to me, because I was like a leetle lady he had known long years ago in de far-off land he came from. Then he got us an engagement at the theatre. That was how we first were in the ballet.

GEORGE [*slapping his leg*]. That fellow was a great brick; I should like to ask him to dinner. What became of him?

ESTHER. I don't know. He left England. [GEORGE *fidgets and looks at watch.*] You are restless, George. What's the matter?

GEORGE. Nothing.

ESTHER. Are you going out?

GEORGE. Yes. [*Looking at his boots and spurs.*] That's the reason I dined in —

ESTHER. To the barracks?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. On duty?

GEORGE [*hesitatingly*]. On duty. [*Rising.*] And, of course, when a man is a soldier, he must go on duty when he's ordered, and where he's ordered — and — [*aside*] — why did I ever enter the service? [*Crosses.*]

ESTHER [*rises, crosses to* GEORGE — *and twining her arm round him*]. George, if you must go out to your club, go; don't mind leaving me. Somehow or other, George, these last few days everything seems to have changed with me — I don't know why. Sometimes my eyes fill with tears, for no reason, and sometimes I feel so happy, for no reason. I don't mind being left by myself as I used to do. When you are a few minutes behind time I don't run to the window and watch for you, and turn irritable. Not that I love you less — no, for I love you more; but often when you are away I don't feel that I am by myself. [*Dropping her head on his breast.*] I never feel alone.

[*Goes to piano and turns over music.*]

GEORGE [*watching* ESTHER]. What angels women are! At least, this one is. I forget all about the others. [*Carriage-wheels heard off.*] If I'd known I could have been so happy, I'd have sold out when I married.

[*Knock at street door.*]

ESTHER [*standing at table*]. That for us, dear?

GEORGE [*at first window*]. Hawtree in a hansom. He's come for — [*aside*] — me. I *must* tell her sooner or later. [*At door.*] Come in, Hawtree.

[*Enter* HAWTREE *in regimentals.*]

HAWTREE. How do? Hope you're well, Mrs. D'Alroy? [*Coming down.*] George, are you coming to —

GEORGE [*coming down left of* HAWTREE]. No, I've dined — [*gives a significant look*] — we dined early.

[ESTHER *plays scraps of music at piano.*]

HAWTREE [*sotto voce*]. Haven't you told her?

GEORGE. No; I daren't.

HAWTREE. But you must.

GEORGE. You know what an awful coward I am. You do it for me.

HAWTREE. Not for worlds. I've just had my own adieus to make.

GEORGE. Ah, yes — to Florence Carberry. How did she take it?

HAWTREE. Oh [*slight pause*], very well.

GEORGE [*earnestly*]. Did she cry?

HAWTREE. No.

GEORGE. Nor exhibit any emotion whatever?

HAWTREE. No, not particularly.

GEORGE [*surprisedly*]. Didn't you kiss her?

HAWTREE. No; Lady Clardonax was in the room.

GEORGE [*wonderingly*]. Didn't she squeeze your hand?

HAWTREE. No.

GEORGE [*impressively*]. Didn't she say anything?

HAWTREE. No, except that she hoped to see me back again soon, and that India was a bad climate.

GEORGE. Umph! It seems to have been a tragic parting [*serio-comically*] — almost as tragic as parting — your back hair.

HAWTREE. Lady Florence is not the sort of person to make a scene.

GEORGE. To be sure, she's not your wife. I wish Esther would be as cool and comfortable. [*After a pause.*] No, I don't — no, I don't.

[*A rap at door. Enter* DIXON.]

GEORGE [*goes up to* DIXON]. Oh, Dixon, lay out my —

DIXON. I have laid them out, sir; everything is ready.

GEORGE [*going down to* HAWTREE — *after a pause — irresolutely*]. I must tell her — mustn't I?

HAWTREE. Better send for her sister. Let Dixon go for her in a cab.

GEORGE. Just so. I'll send him at once. Dixon!

[*Goes up and talks to* DIXON.]

ESTHER [*rising and going to back of chair, left of table*]. Do you want to have a talk with my husband? Shall I go into the dining-room?

HAWTREE. No; Mrs. D'Alroy.

[*Going to table and placing cap on it.*]

GEORGE. No, dear. At once, Dixon. Tell the cabman to drive like — [*exit* DIXON] — like a — cornet just joined.

ESTHER [*to* HAWTREE]. Are you going to take him anywhere?

HAWTREE [GEORGE *comes down and touches* HAWTREE *quickly on the shoulder before he can speak*]. No. [*Aside.*] Yes — to India. [*Crossing to* GEORGE.] Tell her now.

GEORGE. No, no. I'll wait till I put on my uniform. [*Going up.*]

[*Door opens and* POLLY *peeps in.*]

POLLY. How d'ye do, good people — quite well?

[POLLY *gets back of table — kisses* ESTHER.]

GEORGE. Eh? Didn't you meet Dixon?

POLLY. Who?

GEORGE. Dixon — my man.

POLLY. No.

GEORGE. Confound it! — he'll have his ride for nothing. How d'ye do, Polly? [*Shakes hands.*]

POLLY. How d'ye do, George.

[ESTHER *takes* POLLY'S *things and goes up stage with them.* POLLY *places parasol on table.* ESTHER *returns left of* POLLY.]

POLLY. Bless you, my turtles. [*Blessing them, ballet fashion.*] George, kiss your mother. [*He kisses her.*] That's what I call an honorable brother-in-law's kiss. I'm not in the way, am I?

GEORGE [*behind easy-chair right of table*]. Not at all. I'm very glad you've come.

[ESTHER *shows* POLLY *the new music.* POLLY *sits at piano and plays comic tune.*]

HAWTREE [*back to audience, and elbow on easy-chair, aside to* GEORGE]. Under ordinary circumstances she's not a very eligible visitor.

GEORGE. Caste again. [*Going up.*] I'll be back directly. [*Exit* GEORGE.]

HAWTREE [*looking at watch and crossing*]. Mrs. D'Alroy, I —

ESTHER [*who is standing over* POLLY *at piano*]. Going?

POLLY [*rising*]. Do I drive you away, Captain?

[*Taking her parasol from table.* ESTHER *gets to back of chair left of table.*]

HAWTREE. No.

POLLY. Yes, I do. I frighten you, I'm so ugly. I know I do. You frighten me.

HAWTREE. How so?

POLLY. You're so handsome. [*Coming down.*] Particularly in those clothes, for all the world like an inspector of police.

ESTHER [*half aside*]. Polly!

POLLY. I will! I like to take him down a bit.

HAWTREE [*aside*]. This is rather a wild sort of thing in sisters-in-law.

POLLY. Any news, Captain?

HAWTREE [*in a drawling tone*]. No. Is there any news with you?

POLLY [*imitating him*]. Yaas; we've got a new piece coming out at our theatre.

HAWTREE [*interested*]. What's it about?

POLLY [*drawling*]. I don't know. [*To* ESTHER.] Had him there! [HAWTREE *drops his sword from his arm;* POLLY *turns round quickly, hearing the noise, and pretends to be frightened.*] Going to kill anybody today, that you've got your sword on?

HAWTREE. No.

POLLY. I thought not. [*Sings:*]

"With a saber on his brow,
And a helmet by his side,
The soldier sweethearts servant-maids,
And eats cold meat beside."

[*Laughs and walks about, waving her parasol.*]

[*Enter* GEORGE *in uniform, carrying in his hand his sword, sword-belt, and cap.* ESTHER *takes them from him, and places them on sofa, then comes half down.* GEORGE *goes down by* HAWTREE.]

POLLY [*clapping her hands*]. Oh! here's a beautiful brother-in-law! Why didn't you come in on horseback as they do at

Astley's? — gallop in and say [*imitating soldier on horseback and prancing up and down stage during the piece*], Soldiers of France! the eyes of Europe are a-looking at you! The Empire has confidence in you, and France expects that every man this day will do his — little utmost! The foe is before you — more's the pity — and you are before them — worse luck for you! Forward! Go and get killed; and to those who escape, the Emperor will give a little bit of ribbon! Nineteens, about! Forward! Gallop! Charge!

[*Galloping to right, imitating bugle, and giving point with parasol. She nearly spears* HAWTREE'S *nose.* HAWTREE *clasps his hand upon his sword-hilt. She throws herself into chair, laughing, and clapping* HAWTREE'S *cap (from table) upon her head. All laugh and applaud. Carriage-wheels heard without.*]

POLLY. Oh, what a funny little cap; it's got no peak. [*A peal of knocks heard at street door.*] What's that?

GEORGE [*who has hastened to window*]. A carriage! Good heavens — my mother!

HAWTREE [*at window*]. The Marchioness!

ESTHER [*crossing to* GEORGE]. Oh, George!

POLLY [*crossing to window*]. A Marchioness! A real, live Marchioness! Let me look! I never saw a real live Marchioness in all my life.

GEORGE [*forcing her from window*]. No, no, no! She doesn't know I'm married. I must break it to her by degrees. What shall I do?

[*By this time* HAWTREE *is at door right.* ESTHER *at door left.*]

ESTHER. Let me go into the bedroom until —

HAWTREE. Too late! She's on the stairs.

ESTHER. Here, then!

[*At center doors, opens them.*]

POLLY. I want to see a real, live March —

[GEORGE *lifts her in his arms and places her within folding-doors with* ESTHER *— then shutting doors quickly, turns and faces* HAWTREE, *who, gathering up his sword, faces* GEORGE. *They then exchange places much in the fashion of soldiers "mounting guard." As* GEORGE *opens door and admits* MARCHIONESS, HAWTREE *drops down to left.*]

GEORGE [*with great ceremony*]. My dear mother, I saw you getting out of the carriage.

MARCHIONESS. My dear boy [*kissing his forehead*]. I'm so glad I got to London before you embarked. [GEORGE *nervous.* HAWTREE *coming down.*] Captain Hawtree, I think. How do you do?

HAWTREE [*coming forward a little*]. Quite well, I thank your ladyship. I trust you are —

MARCHIONESS [*sitting in easy-chair*]. Oh, quite, thanks. [*Slight pause.*] Do you still see the Countess and Lady Florence?

[*Looking at him through her glasses.*]

HAWTREE. Yes.

MARCHIONESS. Please remember me to them — [HAWTREE *takes cap from table, and places sword under his arm.*] Are you going?

HAWTREE. Yaas — Compelled. [*Bows, crossing round back of table. To* GEORGE *who meets him.*] I'll be at the door for you at seven. We must be at barracks by the quarter. [GEORGE *crosses back of table.*] Poor devil! This comes of a man marrying beneath him.

[*Exit* HAWTREE. GEORGE *comes down left of table.*]

MARCHIONESS. I'm not sorry that he's gone, for I wanted to talk to you alone. Strange that a woman of such good birth as the Countess should encourage the attention of Captain Hawtree for her daughter Florence. [*During these lines* D'ALROY *conceals* POLLY'S *hat and umbrella under table.*] Lady Clardonax was one of the old Carberrys of Hampshire — not the Norfolk Carberrys, but the direct line. And Mr. Hawtree's grandfather was in trade — something in the City — soap, I think. Stool, George! [*Points to stool.* GEORGE *brings it to her. She motions that he is to sit at her feet.* GEORGE *does so with a sigh.*] He's a very nice person, but parvenu, as one may see

by his languor and his swagger. My boy [*kissing his forehead*], I am sure, will never make a mésalliance. He is a D'Alroy, and by his mother's side Plantagenista. The source of our life stream is royal.

GEORGE. How is the Marquis?

MARCHIONESS. Paralyzed. I left him at Spa with three physicians. He is always paralyzed at this time of the year; it is in the family. The paralysis is not personal, but hereditary. I came over to see my steward; got to town last night.

GEORGE. How did you find me out here?

MARCHIONESS. I sent the footman to the barracks, and he saw your man Dixon in the street, and Dixon gave him this address. It's so long since I've seen you. [*Leans back in chair.*] You're looking very well, and I daresay when mounted are quite a "beau cavalier." And so, my boy [*playing with his hair*], you are going abroad for the first time on active service.

GEORGE [*aside*]. Every word can be heard in the next room. If they've only gone upstairs!

MARCHIONESS. And now, my dear boy, before you go I want to give you some advice; and you mustn't despise it because I'm an old woman. We old women know a great deal more than people give us credit for. You are a soldier — so was your father — so was his father — so was mine — so was our royal founder; we were born to lead! The common people expect it from us. It is our duty. Do you not remember in the Chronicles of Froissart? [*With great enjoyment.*] I think I can quote it word for word; I've a wonderful memory for my age. [*With closed eyes.*] It was in the fifty-ninth chapter — "How Godefroy D'Alroy helde the towne of St. Amande duryng the siege before Tournay." It said, "the towne was not closed but with pales, and captayne there was Sir Amory of Pauy — the Seneschall of Carcassoune — who had said it was not able to hold agaynste an hooste, when one Godefroy D'Alroy sayd that rather than he woulde depart, he woulde keepe it to the best of his power. Whereat the souldiers cheered and sayd, 'Lead us on, Sir Godefroy.' And then began a fierce assault; and they within were chased, and sought for shelter from street to street. But Godefroy stood at the gate so valyantly that the souldiers helde the towne until the commyng of the Earl of Haynault with twelve thousande men."

GEORGE [*aside*]. I wish she'd go. If she once gets on to Froissart, she'll never know when to stop.

MARCHIONESS. When my boy fights — and you will fight — he is sure to distinguish himself. It is his nature to — [*toys with his hair*] — he cannot forget his birth. And when you meet these Asiatic ruffians, who have dared to revolt, and to outrage humanity, you will strike as your ancestor Sir Galtier of Chevrault struck at Poictiers. [*Changing tone of voice as if remembering.*] Foissart mentions it thus: "Sir Galtier, with his four squires, was in the front, in that battell, and there did marvels in arms. And Sir Galtier rode up to the Prince, and sayd to him — 'Sir, take your horse and ryde forth; this journey is yours. God is this daye in your handes. Gette us to the French Kynge's batayle. I think verily by his valyantesse, he woll not fly. Advance banner in the name of God and of Saynt George!' And Sir Galtier galloped forward to see his Kynge's victory, and meet his own death."

GEORGE [*aside*]. If Esther hears all this!

MARCHIONESS. There is another subject about which I should have spoken to you before this; but an absurd prudery forbade me. I may never see you more. I am old — and you — are going into battle — [*kissing his forehead with emotion*] — and this may be our last meeting. [*Noise heard within folding-doors.*] What's that?

GEORGE. Nothing — my man Dixon in there.

MARCHIONESS. We may not meet again on this earth. I do not fear your conduct, my George, with men; but I know the temptations that beset a youth who is well born. But a true soldier, a true gentleman, should not only be without

fear, but without reproach. It is easier to fight a furious man than to forego the conquest of a lovesick girl. A thousand Sepoys slain in battle cannot redeem the honor of a man who has betrayed the confidence of a trusting woman. Think, George, what dishonor — what stain upon your manhood — to hurl a girl to shame and degradation! And what excuse for it? That she is plebeian? A man of real honor will spare the woman who has confessed her love for him as he would give quarter to an enemy he had disarmed. [*Taking his hands.*] Let my boy avoid the snares so artfully spread; and when he asks his mother to welcome the woman he has chosen for his wife, let me take her to my arms and plant a motherly kiss upon the white brow of a lady. [*Noise of a fall heard within folding-doors. Rising.*] What's that?

GEORGE [*rising*]. Nothing.

MARCHIONESS. I heard a cry.

[*Folding-doors open; discovering* ESTHER *with* POLLY, *staggering in, fainting.*]

POLLY. George! George!

[GEORGE *goes up and* ESTHER *falls in his arms.* GEORGE *places* ESTHER *on sofa.* GEORGE *on her right,* POLLY *on her left.*]

MARCHIONESS. [*coming down*]. Who are these *women?*

POLLY. Women!

MARCHIONESS. George D'Alroy, these persons should have been sent away. How could you dare to risk your mother meeting women of their stamp?

POLLY [*violently*]. What does she mean? How dare she call me a woman? What's she, I'd like to know?

GEORGE. Silence, Polly! You mustn't insult my mother.

MARCHIONESS. The insult is from you. I leave you, and I hope that time may induce me to forget this scene of degradation. [*Turning to go.*]

GEORGE. Stay, mother. [MARCHIONESS *turns slightly away.*] Before you go [GEORGE *has raised* ESTHER *from sofa in his arms*] let me present to you Mrs. George D'Alroy. *My wife!*

MARCHIONESS. Married!

GEORGE. Married.

[MARCHIONESS *sinks into easy-chair;* GEORGE *replaces* ESTHER *on sofa, but still retains her hand. Three hesitating taps at door heard.* GEORGE *crosses to door, opens it, discovers* ECCLES, *who enters.* GEORGE *drops down back of* MARCHIONESS'S *chair.*]

ECCLES. They told us to come up. When your man came Polly was out; so I thought I should do instead. [*Calling at door.*] Come up, Sam.

[*Enter* SAM *in his Sunday clothes, with short cane and smoking a cheroot. He nods and grins—*POLLY *points to* MARCHIONESS — SAM *takes cheroot from his mouth and quickly removes his hat.*]

ECCLES. Sam had just called; so we three — Sam and I, and your man, all came in the 'ansom cab together. Didn't we, Sam?

[ECCLES *and* SAM *go over to the girls, and* ECCLES *drops down to front of table—smilingly.*]

MARCHIONESS [*with glasses up, to* GEORGE.] Who is this?

GEORGE [*coming left of* MARCHIONESS]. My wife's father.

MARCHIONESS. What is he?

GEORGE. A — nothing.

ECCLES. I am one of nature's noblemen. Happy to see you, my lady — [*turning to her*] — now, my daughters have told me who you are — [GEORGE *turns his back in an agony as* ECCLES *crosses to* MARCHIONESS] — we old folks, fathers and mothers of the young couples, ought to make friends.

[*Holding out his dirty hand.*]

MARCHIONESS [*shrinking back*]. Go away! [ECCLES *goes back to table again, disgusted.*] What's his name?

GEORGE. Eccles.

MARCHIONESS. Eccles! Eccles! There never was an Eccles. He don't exist.

ECCLES. Don't he though? What d'ye call this?

[*Goes up again to back of table as* SAM *drops down. He is just going to take a decanter when* SAM *stops him.*]

MARCHIONESS. No Eccles was ever born!

GEORGE. He takes the liberty of breathing notwithstanding. [*Aside.*] And I wish he wouldn't.

MARCHIONESS. And who is the little man? Is he also Eccles?

[SAM *looks round.* POLLY *gets close up to him, and looks with defiant glance at the* MARCHIONESS.]

GEORGE. No.

MARCHIONESS. Thank goodness! What then?

GEORGE. His name is Gerridge.

MARCHIONESS. *Gerridge!* It breaks one's teeth. Why is he here?

GEORGE. He is making love to Polly, my wife's sister.

MARCHIONESS. And what is he?

GEORGE. A gasman.

MARCHIONESS. He looks it. [GEORGE *goes up to* ESTHER.] And what is she — the — the sister?

[ECCLES, *who has been casting longing eyes at the decanter on table, edges toward it, and when he thinks no one is noticing, fills wineglass.*]

POLLY [*asserting herself indignantly*]. I'm in the ballet at the Theatre Royal, Lambeth. So was Esther. We're not ashamed of what we are! We have no cause to be.

SAM. That's right, Polly! pitch into them swells! — who are they?

[ECCLES *by this time has seized wineglass, and turning his back, is about to drink, when* HAWTREE *enters.* ECCLES *hides glass under his coat, and pretends to be looking up at picture.*]

HAWTREE [*entering*]. George! [*Stops suddenly, looking round.*] So, all's known!

MARCHIONESS [*rising*]. Captain Hawtree, see me to my carriage; I am broken-hearted.

[*Takes* HAWTREE'S *arm and is going up.*]

ECCLES [*who has tasted the claret, spits it out with a grimace, exclaiming*]. Rot!

[POLLY *goes to piano — sits on stool —* SAM, *back to audience, leaning on piano.* ECCLES *exits through folding-doors.*]

GEORGE [*to* MARCHIONESS]. Don't go in anger. You may not see me again.

[ESTHER *rises in nervous excitement, clutching* GEORGE'S *hand.* MARCHIONESS *stops.* ESTHER *brings* GEORGE *down.*]

ESTHER [*with arm round his neck*] Oh, George! must you go?

[*They come to front of table.*]

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. I can't leave you. I'll go with you!

GEORGE. Impossible! The country is too unsettled.

ESTHER. May I come after you?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER [*with her head on his shoulder*]. I may.

MARCHIONESS [*coming down,* HAWTREE *at door*]. It is his duty to go. His honor calls him. The honor of his family — *our* honor.

ESTHER. But I love him so! Pray don't be angry with me!

HAWTREE [*looking at watch and coming down*]. George!

GEORGE. I must go, love.

[HAWTREE *goes up to door again.*]

MARCHIONESS [*advancing*]. Let me arm you, George — let your mother, as in the days of old. There is blood — and blood, my son. See, your wife cries when she should be proud of you!

GEORGE. My Esther is all that is good and noble. No lady born to a coronet could be gentler or more true. Esther, my wife, fetch me my sword, and buckle my belt around me.

ESTHER [*clinging to him*] No, no; I can't!

GEORGE. Try. [*Whispers to* ESTHER. To please my mother. [*To* MARCHIONESS.] You shall see. [ESTHER *totters to stage,* POLLY *assisting her, and brings down his sword. As* ESTHER *is trying to buckle his belt, he whispers.*] I've left money for you, my darling. My lawyer will call on you tomorrow. Forgive me. I tried hard to tell you we were ordered for India; but when the time came, my heart failed me, and I —

[ESTHER, *before she can succeed in fastening his sword-belt, reels, and falls fainting in his arms.* POLLY *hurries*

ries to her. SAM *standing at piano, looking frightened;* HAWTREE *with hand upon handle of door;* MARCHIONESS *looking on, at right of* GEORGE.]

ACT III

SCENE.—*The room in Stangate (as in Act I). Same furniture as in Act I, with exception of piano, with roll of music tied up on it, in place of bureau. Map of India over mantelpiece. Sword with crape knot, spurs, and cap, craped, hanging over chimney piece. Portrait of D'Alroy (large) on mantelpiece. Berceaunette, and child, with coral, in it. Polly's bonnet and shawl hanging on peg. Small tin saucepan in fender, fire alight, and kettle on it. Two candles (tallow) in sticks, one of which is broken about three inches from the top and hangs over. Slate and pencil on table. Jug on table, bandbox and ballet skirt on table.*

[*At rise of curtain* POLLY *discovered at table, back of stage. Comes down and places skirt in bandbox. She is dressed in black.*]

POLLY [*placing skirt in box, and leaning her chin upon her hand*]. There—there's the dress for poor Esther in case she gets the engagement, which I don't suppose she will. It's too good luck, and good luck never comes to her, poor thing. [*Goes up to back of cradle.*] Baby's asleep still. How good he looks—as good as if he were dead, like his poor father; and alive too, at the same time, like his dear self. Ah! dear me; it's a strange world. [*Sits in chair right of table, feeling in pocket for money.*] Four and elevenpence. That must do for to-day and to-morrow. Esther is going to bring in the rusks for Georgy. [*Takes up slate.*] Three, five—eight, and four—twelve, one shilling—father can only have twopence. [*This all to be said in one breath.*] He must make do with that till Saturday, when I get my salary. If Esther gets the engagement, I shan't have many more salaries to take; I shall leave the stage and retire into private life. I wonder if I shall like private life, and if private life will like me. It will seem so strange being no longer Miss Mary Eccles—but Mrs. Samuel Gerridge. [*Writes it on slate.*] "Mrs. Samuel Gerridge." [*Laughs bashfully.*] La! to think of my being Mrs. Anybody! How annoyed Susan Smith will be! [*Writing on slate.*] "Mrs. Samuel Gerridge presents her compliments to Miss Susan Smith, and Mrs. Samuel Gerridge requests the favor of Miss Susan Smith's company to tea, on Tuesday evening next, at Mrs. Samuel Gerridge's house." [*Pause.*] Poor Susan! [*Beginning again.*] "P.S.—Mrs Samuel Gerridge—"

[*Knock heard at room door;* POLLY *starts.*]

SAM [*without*]. Polly, open the door.

POLLY. Sam! come in.

SAM [*without*]. I can't.

POLLY. Why not?

SAM. I've got somethin' on my 'ead.

[POLLY *rises and opens door.* SAM *enters, carrying two rolls of wallpaper, one in each hand, and a small table on his head, which he deposits down stage, then puts roll of paper on piano, as also his cap.* SAM *has a rule-pocket in corduroys.*]

POLLY [*shuts door*]. What's that?

SAM [*pointing to table with pride*]. Furniture. How are you, my Polly? [*Kissing her.*] You look handsomer than ever this morning. [*Dances and sings.*] "Tid-dle-di-tum-ti-di-do."

POLLY. What's the matter, Sam? Are you mad?

SAM. No, 'appy—much the same thing.

POLLY. Where have you been these two days?

SAM [*all excitement*]. That's just what I'm goin' to tell yer. Polly, my pet, my brightest batswing and most brilliant burner, what do yer think?

POLLY. Oh, do go on, Sam, or I'll slap your face.

SAM. Well, then, you've 'eard me

speak of old Binks, the plumber, glazier, and gasfitter, who died six months ago?

POLLY. Yes.

SAM [*sternly and deliberately*]. I've bought 'is business.

POLLY. No!

SAM [*excitedly*]. Yes, of 'is widow, old Mrs. Binks—so much down, and so much more at the end of the year.

[*Dances and sings.*]

Ri-ti-toodle
Roodle-oodle
Ri-ti-tooral-lay.

POLLY. La, Sam.

SAM [*pacing stage up and down*]. Yes; I've bought the goodwill, fixtures, fittin's, stock, rolls of gas-pipe, and sheets of lead. [*Jumps on table, quickly facing* POLLY.] Yes, Polly, I'm a tradesman with a shop—a master tradesman. [*Coming to* POLLY *seriously.*] All I want to complete the premises is a missus.

[*Tries to kiss her. She pushes him away.*]

POLLY. Sam, don't be foolish.

SAM [*arm round her waist*]. Come and be Mrs. Sam Gerridge, Polly, my patent-safety-day-and-night-light. You'll furnish me completely.

[POLLY *goes up,* SAM *watching her admiringly; he then sees slate, snatches it up, and looks at it. She snatches it from him with a shriek, and rubs out the writing, looking daggers at him,* SAM *laughing.*]

SAM. Only to think now.

[*Putting arm round her waist.* POLLY *pouting.*]

POLLY. Don't be a goose.

SAM [*going toward table*]. I spent the whole of yesterday lookin' up furniture. Now I bought that a bargain, and I brought it 'ere to show you for your approval. I've bought lots of other things, and I'll bring 'em all 'ere to show you for your approval.

POLLY. I couldn't think what had become of you. [*Seated right of table.*]

SAM. Couldn't yer? Oh, I say, I want yer to choose the new paper for the little back-parlor just behind the shop, you know. Now what d'yer think of this?

[*Fetching a pattern from piano and unrolling it.*]

POLLY. No, I don't like that. [SAM *fetches the other, a flaming pattern.*] Ah! that's neat.

SAM. Yes, that's neat and quiet. I'll new-paper it, and new-furnish it, and it shall all be bran-new.

[*Puts paper on top of piano.*]

POLLY. But won't it cost a lot of money?

SAM [*bravely*]. I can work for it. With customers in the shop, and you in the back-parlor, I can work like fifty men. [*Sits on table, beckons* POLLY *to him; she comes left of table,* SAM *puts his arm round* POLLY, *sentimentally.*] Only fancy, at night, when the shop's closed, and the shutters are up, counting out the till together! [*Changing his manner.*] Besides, that isn't all I've been doin'. I've been writin', and what I've written, I've got printed.

POLLY. No!

SAM. True.

POLLY. You've been writing—about me? [*Delighted.*]

SAM. No—about the shop. [POLLY *disgusted.*] Here it is. [*Takes roll of circulars from pocket of his canvas slop.*] Yer mustn't laugh—yer know—it's my first attempt. I wrote it the night before last; and when I thought of you the words seemed to flow like—red-hot solder. [*Reads.*] Hem! "Samuel Gerridge takes this opportunity of informin' the nobility, gentry, and inhabitants of the Borough-road—"

POLLY. The Borough-road?

SAM. Well, there ain't many of the nobility and gentry as lives in the Borough-road, but it pleases the inhabitants to make 'em believe yer think so [*resuming*]—"of informin' the nobility, gentry and inhabitants of the Borough-road, and its vicinity"—and "its vicinity." [*Looking at her.*] Now I think that's rather good, eh?

POLLY. Yes. [*Doubtfully.*] I've heard worse.

SAM. I first thought of saying neighbor'ood; but then vicinity sounds so much more genteel [*resuming*]—"and its vicinity, that 'e has entered upon the

business of the late Mr. Binks, 'is relict, the present Mrs. B., 'avin' disposed to 'im of the same"—now listen, Polly, because it gets interestin'—"S. G.—"

POLLY. S. G. Who's he?

SAM [*looking at* POLLY *with surprise*]. Why, me. S. G.—Samuel Gerridge—me, us. We're S. G. Now don't interrupt me, or you'll cool my metal, and then I can't work. "S. G. 'opes that, by a constant attention to business, and"—mark this—"by supplyin' the best articles at the most reasonable prices, to merit a continuance of those favors which it will ever be 'is constant study to deserve." There! [*Turning on table triumphantly.*] Stop a bit,—there's a little bit more yet. "Bell-'angin', gas-fittin', plumbin', and glazin', as usual." There! and it's all my own!

[*Puts circular on mantelpiece, and crossing, contemplates it.*]

POLLY. Beautiful, Sam. It looks very attractive from here, don't it?

SAM. [*Postman's knock.*] There's the postman. I'll go. I shall send some of these out by post.

[*Goes off and returns with letter.*]

POLLY [*taking it*]. Oh, for Esther. I know who it's from. [*Places letter on mantelpiece. At chair left of table.* SAM *sits corner of table, reading circular. Seriously.*] Sam, who do you think was here last night?

SAM. Who?

POLLY. Captain Hawtree.

SAM [*deprecatingly*]. Oh, 'im!—Come back from India, I suppose.

POLLY. Yes—luckily Esther was out.

SAM. I never liked that long swell. He was a 'uppish, conceited—

POLLY [*sitting at end of table*]. Oh, he's better than he used to be—he's a major now. He's only been in England a fortnight.

SAM. Did he tell yer anything about De Alroy?

POLLY [*leaning against table end*]. Yes; he said he was riding out not far from the cantonment, and was surrounded by a troop of Sepoy cavalry, which took him prisoner, and galloped off with him.

SAM. But about 'is death?

POLLY. Oh! [*hiding her face*] that, he said, was believed to be too terrible to mention.

SAM [*crossing to* POLLY *at table*]. Did 'e tell yer anything else?

POLLY. No; he asked a lot of questions, and I told him everything. How poor Esther had taken her widowhood, and what a dear good baby the baby was and what a comfort to us all, and how Esther had come back to live with us again.

SAM [*sharply*]. And the reason for it?

POLLY [*looking down*]. Yes.

SAM. How your father got all the money that 'e'd left for Esther?

POLLY [*sharply*]. Don't say any more about that, Sam.

SAM. Oh! I only think Captain 'Awtree ought to know where the money *did* go to, and you shouldn't try and screen your father, and let 'im suppose that you and Esther spent it all.

POLLY. I told him—I told him—I told him. [*Angrily.*]

SAM. Did you tell 'im that your father was always at 'armonic meetin's at taverns, and 'ad 'arf cracked 'isself with drink, and was always singin' the songs and makin' the speeches 'e 'eard there, and was always goin' on about 'is wrongs as one of the workin' classes? 'E's a pretty one for one of the workin' classes, 'e is! 'Asn't done a stroke of work these twenty year. Now, I *am* one of the workin' classes, but I *don't* 'owl about it. I work; I don't spout.

POLLY. Hold your tongue, Sam. I won't have you say any more against poor father. He has his faults, but he's a very clever man. [*Sighing.*]

SAM. Ah! What else did Captain Hawtree say?

POLLY. He advised us to apply to Mr. D'Alroy's mother.

SAM. What! the Marquissy? And what did you say to that?

POLLY. I said that Esther wouldn't hear of it. And so the Major said that he'd write to Esther, and I suppose this is the letter.

SAM. Now, Polly, come along and choose the paper for the little back-parlor.

[*Going to table and taking it up to wall behind door.*]

POLLY [*rising*]. Can't. Who's to mind baby?

SAM. The *baby?* Oh, I forgot all about 'im. [*Goes to cradle.*] I see yer! [*Goes to window casually.*] There's your father comin' down the street. Won't 'e mind 'im?

POLLY [*going up*]. I daresay he will. If I promise him an extra sixpence on Saturday. [SAM *opens window.*] Hi! Father! [POLLY *goes to cradle.*]

SAM [*aside*]. 'E looks down in the mouth, 'e does. I suppose 'e's 'ad no drink this morning. [*Goes to* POLLY.]

[*Enter* ECCLES *in shabby black. Pauses on entering, looks at* SAM, *turns away in disgust, takes off hat, places it on piano, and shambles across stage. Taking chair, places it, and sits before fire.*]

POLLY [*goes to* ECCLES]. Come in to stop a bit, father?

ECCLES. No; not for long. [SAM *comes down.*] Good morning, Samuel. Going back to work? That's right, my boy — stick to it. [*Pokes fire.*] Stick to it — nothing like it.

SAM [*aside*]. Now, isn't that too bad? No, Mr. Eccles, I've knocked off for the day.

ECCLES [*waving poker*]. That's bad — that's very bad! Nothing like work — for the young. I don't work so much as I used to, myself, but I like to [POLLY *sitting on corner of table up left*] see the young 'uns at it. It does me good, and it does them good, too. What does the poet say?

[*Rising, impressively, and leaning on table.*]

"A carpenter said though that was well spoke,
It was better by far to defend it with hoak.
A currier, wiser than both put together,
Said say what you will, there is nothing like *labor.*
For a' that, and a' that,
Your ribbon, gown, and a' that,
The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The working man's the gold for a' that."

[*Sits again, triumphantly wagging his head.*]

SAM [*aside*]. This is one of the public-house loafers, that wants all the wages and none of the work, an idle old —

[*Goes in disgust to piano, puts on cap, and takes rolls of paper under his arm.*]

POLLY [*to* ECCLES]. Esther will be in by-and-by. [*Persuasively.*] Do, father.

ECCLES. No, no, I tell you I won't!

POLLY [*whispering, arm round his neck*]. And I'll give you sixpence extra on Saturday.

[ECCLES's *face relaxes into a broad grin.* POLLY *gets hat and cloak.*]

ECCLES. Ah! you sly little puss, you know how to get over your poor old father.

SAM [*aside*]. Yes, with sixpence.

POLLY [*putting on bonnet and cloak at door*]. Give the cradle a rock if baby cries.

SAM [*crossing to* ECCLES]. If you should 'appen to want employment or amusement, Mr. Eccles, just cast your eye over this. [*Puts circular on table, then joins* POLLY *at door*]. Stop a bit, I've forgot to give the baby one.

[*Throws circular into cradle. Exeunt,* POLLY *first.* ECCLES *takes out pipe from pocket, looks into it, then blows through it making a squeaking noise, and finishes by tenderly placing it on table. He then hunts all his pockets for tobacco, finally finding a little paper packet containing a screw of tobacco in his waistcoat pocket, which he also places on table after turning up the corner of the tablecloth for the purpose of emptying the contents of his pocket of the few remnants of past screws of tobacco on to the bare table and mixing a little out of the packet with it and filling pipe. He then brushes all that remains on the table into the paper packet, pinches it up, and carefully replaces it in waistcoat pocket. Having put the pipe into his mouth, he looks about for a light, across his shoulder and under table, though never rising from the chair;*

seeing nothing, his face assumes an expression of comic anguish. Turning to table he angrily replaces tablecloth and then notices SAM'S *circular. His face relaxes into a smile, and picking it up he tears the circular in half, makes a spill of it, and lighting it at fire, stands, with his back to fireplace, and smokes vigorously.*]

ECCLES. Poor Esther! Nice market she's brought her pigs to — ugh! Mind the baby indeed! What good is he to me? That fool of a girl to throw away all her chances! — a *honorable-hess* — and her father not to have on him the price of a pint of early beer or a quartern of cool, refreshing gin! Stopping in here to rock a young honorable! Cuss him! [*Business, puffs smoke in baby's face, rocking cradle.*] Are we slaves, we workingmen? [*Sings savagely.*] "Britons never, never, never shall be — " [*Nodding his head sagaciously, sits by table.*] I won't stand this, I've writ to the old cat — I mean to the Marquissy — to tell her that her daughter-in-law and her grandson is almost starving. That fool Esther is too proud to write to her for money. I hate pride — it's *beastly!* [*Rising.*] There's no beastly pride about me. [*Goes up, smacking his lips.*] I'm as dry as a lime-kiln. [*Takes up jug.*] Milk! — [*with disgust*] for this young aristocratic pauper. Everybody in the house is sacrificed for him! [*At foot of cradle, with arms on chair back.*] And to think that a *workingman,* and a member of the Committee of Banded Brothers for the Regeneration of Human Kind, by means of equal diffusion of intelligence and equal division of property, should be thusty, while this cub — [*Draws aside curtain, and looks at child. After a pause* —] That there coral he's got round his neck is *gold,* real *gold!* [*With hand on knob at end of cradle.*] Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh, Class Legislation! — *is this right?* Shall this mindless wretch enjoy himself, while sleeping, with a jeweled gaud, and his poor old grandfather want the price of half a pint? *No!* it shall not be! Rather than see it, I will myself resent this outrage on the rights of man! and in this holy crusade of class against class, of the weak and lowly against the *powerful and strong* — [*pointing to child*] — I will strike one blow for freedom! [*Goes to back of cradle.*] He's asleep. It will fetch ten bob round the corner; and if the Marquissy gives us anything it can be got out with some o' that. [*Steals coral.*] Lie still, my darling! — it's grandfather a-watchin' over you —

"Who ran to catch me when I fell,
And kicked the place to make it well?
My grandfather!"

[*Rocking cradle with one hand; leaves it quickly, and as he takes hat off piano,* ESTHER *enters. She is dressed as a widow, her face pale, and her manner quick and imperious. She carries a parcel and paper bag of rusks in her hand; she puts parcel on table, goes to cradle, kneels down, and kisses child.*]

ECCLES. My lovey had a nice walk? You should wrap yourself up well — you are so liable to catch cold.

ESTHER. My Georgy? — Where's his coral? [ECCLES, *going to door, fumbles with lock nervously, and is going out as* ESTHER *speaks.*] Gone! — Father! [*Rising* — ECCLES *stops.*] The child's coral — where is it?

ECCLES [*confused*]. Where's what, duckey?

ESTHER. The coral! You've got it — I know it! Give it me! [*Quickly and imperiously.*] Give it me! [ECCLES *takes coral from his pocket and gives it back.*] If you *dare* to touch *my* child —

[*Goes to cradle.*]

ECCLES. Esther! [*Going quickly to piano and banging hat on it.*] Am I not your father? —

[ESTHER *gets round to front of table.*]

ESTHER. And I am his mother!

ECCLES [*coming to her*]. Do you bandy words with me, you pauper, you pauper!!! to whom I have given shelter — shelter to you and your brat! I've a good mind —

[*Raising his clenched fist.*]

ESTHER [*confronting him*]. If you dare! I am no longer your little drudge

—your frightened servant. When mother died—[Eccles *changes countenance and cowers beneath her glance*]—and I was so high, I tended you, and worked for you—and you beat me. That time is past. I am a woman—I am a wife—a widow—*a mother!* Do you think I will let you outrage *him?* Touch me if you dare! [*Advancing a step.*]

Eccles [*bursting into tears and coming down*]. And this is my own child, which I nussed when a babby, and sang "Cootsicum Coo" to afore she could speak. [*Gets hat from piano, and returns a step or two.*] Hon. Mrs. De Alroy [Esther *drops down behind chair by table*], I forgive you for all that you have said. I forgive you for all that you have done. In everything that I have done I have acted with the best intentions. May the babe in that cradle never treat you as you have this day *tret* a gray 'aired father. May he never cease to love and honor you, as you have ceased to love and honor me, after all that I have done for you, and the position to which I have raised you by my own *industry.* [*Goes to door.*] May he never behave to you like the bad daughters of King Lear; and may you never live to feel how much more sharper than a serpent's [*slight pause as if remembering quotation*] scale it is to have a thankless child! [*Exit.*]

Esther [*kneeling back of cradle*]. My darling! [*Arranging bed and placing coral to baby's lips, then to her own.*] Mamma's come back to her own. Did she stay away from him so long? [*Rises, and looks at saber, etc.*] My George! to think that you can never look upon his face or hear his voice. My brave, gallant, handsome husband! My lion and my love! [*Comes down, pacing stage.*] Oh! to be a soldier, and to fight the wretches who destroyed him—who took my darling from me! [*Action of cutting with saber.*] To gallop miles upon their upturned faces. [*Crossing with action, breaks down sobbing at mantelpiece; sees letter.*] What's this? Captain Hawtree's hand. [*Sitting in chair, reads, at left hand of table.*] "My dear Mrs. D'Alroy: I returned to England less than a fortnight ago. I have some papers and effects of my poor friend's, which I am anxious to deliver to you, and I beg of you to name a day when I can call with them and see you; at the same time let me express my deepest sympathy with your affliction. Your husband's loss was mourned by every man in the regiment. [Esther *lays the letter on her heart, and then resumes reading.*] I have heard with great pain of the pecuniary embarrassments into which accident and imprudence of others have placed you. I trust you will not consider me, one of poor George's oldest comrades and friends, either intrusive or impertinent in sending the inclosed [*she takes out a check*], and in hoping that, should any further difficulties arise, you will inform me of them, and remember that I am, dear Mrs. D'Alroy, now, and always, your faithful and sincere friend, Arthur Hawtree." [Esther *goes to cradle and bends over it.*] Oh, *his* boy, if you could read it!

[*Sobs, with head on head of cradle.*]

[*Enter* Polly.]

Polly. Father gone!

Esther. Polly, you look quite flurried. [Polly *laughs and whispers to* Esther.]

Esther [*near head of table, taking* Polly *in her arms and kissing her*]. So soon? Well, my darling, I hope you may be happy.

Polly. Yes. Sam's going to speak to father about it this afternoon. [*Crosses round table, putting rusks in saucepan.*] Did you see the agent, dear?

Esther [*sits by table*]. Yes; the manager didn't come—he broke his appointment again.

Polly [*sits opposite at table*]. Nasty, rude fellow!

Esther. The agent said it didn't matter; he thought I should get the engagement. He'll only give me thirty shillings a week, though.

Polly. But you said that two pounds was the regular salary.

Esther. Yes, but they know I'm poor.

and want the engagement, and so take advantage of me.

POLLY. Never mind, Esther. I put the dress in that bandbox. It looks almost as good as new.

ESTHER. I've had a letter from Captain Hawtree.

POLLY. I know, dear; he came here last night.

ESTHER. A dear, good letter — speaking of George, and inclosing a check for thirty pounds.

POLLY. Oh, how kind! Don't you tell father.

[*Noise of carriage-wheels without.*]

ESTHER. I shan't.

[ECCLES *enters, breathless.* ESTHER *and* POLLY *rise.*]

ECCLES. It's the Marquissy in her coach. [ESTHER *puts on the lid of bandbox.*] Now, girls, do be civil to her, and she may do something for us. [*Places hat on piano.*] I see the coach as I was coming out of the "Rainbow."

[*Hastily pulls an old comb out of his pocket, and puts his hair in order.*]

ESTHER. The Marquise!

[ESTHER *comes down to end of table,* POLLY *holding her hand.*]

ECCLES [*at door*]. This way, my lady — up them steps. They're rather awkward for the likes o' you; but them as is poor and lowly must do as best they can with steps and circumstances.

[*Enter* MARQUISE. *She surveys the place with aggressive astonishment.*]

MARQUISE [*going down, half aside*]. What a hole! And to think that my grandson should breathe such an atmosphere, and be contaminated by such associations! [*To* ECCLES, *who is a little up.*] Which is the young woman who married my son?

ESTHER. I am Mrs. George D'Alroy, widow of George D'Alroy. Who are you?

MARQUISE. I am his mother, the Marquise de St. Maur.

ESTHER [*with the grand air*]. Be seated, I beg.

[ECCLES *takes chair from right center, which* ESTHER *immediately seizes as* SAM *enters with an easy-chair on his head, which he puts down, not seeing* MARQUISE, *who instantly sits down in it, concealing it completely.*]

SAM [*astonished*]. It's the Marquissy! [*Looking at her.*] My eyes! These aristocrats are fine women — plenty of 'em — [*describing circle*] quality and quantity!

POLLY. Go away, Sam; you'd better come back.

[ECCLES *nudges him and bustles him toward door. Exit* SAM. ECCLES *shuts door on him.*]

ECCLES [*coming down right of* MARQUISE, *rubbing his hands*]. If we'd a know'd your ladyship 'ad been a-coming we'd a' 'ad the place cleaned up a bit.

[*With hands on chair back, in lower right corner of stage. He gets round to right, behind* MARQUISE, *who turns the chair slightly from him.*]

POLLY. Hold your tongue, father!

[ECCLES *crushed.*]

MARQUISE [*to* ESTHER]. You remember me, do you not?

ESTHER. Perfectly, though I only saw you once. [*Seating herself en grande dame.*] May I ask what has procured me the honor of this visit?

MARQUISE. I was informed that you were in want, and I came to offer you assistance.

ESTHER. I thank you for your offer, and the delicate consideration for my feelings with which it is made. I need no assistance.

[ECCLES *groans and leans on piano.*]

MARQUISE. A letter that I received last night informed me that you did.

ESTHER. May I ask if that letter came from Captain Hawtree?

MARQUISE. No — from this person — your father, I think.

ESTHER [*to* ECCLES]. How dare you interfere in my affairs?

ECCLES. My lovey, I did it with the best intentions.

MARQUISE. Then you will not accept assistance from me?

ESTHER. No.

POLLY [*aside to* ESTHER, *holding her hand*]. Bless you, my darling.

[POLLY *standing beside her.*]

MARQUISE. But you have a child — a son — my grandson. [*With emotion.*]

ESTHER. Master D'Alroy wants for nothing.

POLLY [*aside*]. And never shall.

[ECCLES *groans and turns on to piano.*]

MARQUISE. I came here to propose that my grandson should go back with me.

[POLLY *rushes up to cradle.*]

ESTHER [*rising defiantly*]. What! part with my boy! I'd sooner die!

MARQUISE. You can see him when you wish. As for money, I —

ESTHER. Not for ten thousand million worlds — not for ten thousand million marchionesses!

ECCLES. Better do what the good lady asks you, my dear; she's advising you for your own good, and for the child's likewise.

MARQUISE. Surely you cannot intend to bring up my son's son in a place like this?

ESTHER. I do. [*Goes up to cradle.*]

ECCLES. It *is* a poor place, and we are poor people, sure enough. We ought not to fly in the faces of our pastors and masters — our pastresses and mistresses.

POLLY [*aside*]. Oh, hold your tongue, do! [*Up at cradle.*]

ESTHER [*before cradle*]. Master George D'Alroy will remain with his mother. The offer to take him from her is an insult to his dead father and to him.

ECCLES [*aside*]. He don't seem to feel it, stuck-up little beast.

MARQUISE. But you have no money — how can you rear him? — how can you educate him? — how can you live?

ESTHER [*tearing dress from bandbox*]. Turn Columbine — go on the stage again and dance.

MARQUISE [*rising*]. You are insolent — you forget that I am a lady.

ESTHER. You forget that I am a mother. Do you dare to offer to buy my child — *his* breathing image, *his* living memory — with money? [*Crosses to door and throws it open.*] There is the door — go! [*Picture.*]

ECCLES [*to* MARQUISE, *who has risen, aside*]. Very sorry, my lady, as you should be tret in this way, which was not my wishes.

MARQUISE. Silence! [ECCLES *retreats, putting back chair.* MARQUISE *goes up to door.*] Mrs. D'Alroy, if anything could have increased my sorrow for the wretched marriage my poor son was *decoyed* into, it would be your conduct this day to his mother. [*Exit.*]

ESTHER [*falling into* POLLY'S *arms*]. Oh, Polly! Polly!

ECCLES [*looking after her*]. To go away and not to leave a sov behind her. [*Running up to open door.*] Cat! Cat! Stingy old cat!

[*Almost runs to fire, and pokes it violently; carriage-wheels heard without.*]

ESTHER. I'll go to my room and lie down. Let me have the baby, or that old woman may come back and steal him.

[*Exit* ESTHER, *and* POLLY *follows with baby.*]

ECCLES. Well, women is the obstinatest devils as never wore horseshoes. Children? Beasts! Beasts!

[*Enter* SAM *and* POLLY.]

SAM. Come along, Polly, and let's get it over at once. [SAM *places cap on piano, and goes to table.* POLLY *takes bandbox from table, and places it up stage.*] Now, Mr. Eccles [ECCLES *turns suddenly, facing* SAM], since yo've been talkin' on family matters, I'd like to 'ave a word with yer, so take this opportunity to —

ECCLES [*waving his hand grandly*]. Take what you like, and then order more [*rising and leaning over table*], Samuel Gerridge. That hand is a hand that has never turned its back on a friend, or a bottle to give him.

[*Sings, front of table.*]

I'll stand by my friend,
I'll stand by my friend,
I'll stand by my friend,
If he'll stand to me — me, gentlemen!

SAM. Well, Mr. Eccles, sir, it's this —

POLLY [*aside, coming down to* SAM]. Don't tell him too sudden, Sam — it might shock his feelings.

SAM. It's this: yer know that for the last four years I've been keepin' company with Mary — Polly.

[*Turning to her and smiling.* ECCLES *drops into chair as if shot.*]

ECCLES. Go it! go it! strike home, young man! Strike on this gray head! [*Sings.*] "Britons, strike home!" Here [*tapping his chest*], to my heart! Don't spare me! Have a go at my gray hairs. Pull 'em — pull 'em out! A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull all together!

[*Cries, and drops his face on arm on table.*]

POLLY. Oh, father! I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world.

[*Patting his head.*]

SAM. No, Mr. Eccles, I don't want to 'urt your feelin's, but I'm a-goin' to enter upon a business. Here's a circular. [*Offering one.*]

ECCLES [*indignantly*]. Circ'lars. What are circ'lars — compared to a father's feelings?

SAM. And I want Polly to name the day, sir, and so I ask you —

ECCLES. This is 'ard, this is 'ard. One of my daughters marries a soger. The other goes a-gasfitting.

SAM [*annoyed*]. The business which will enable me to maintain a wife is that of the late Mr. Binks, plumber, glazier, etc.

ECCLES [*rising, sings. Air, "Lost Rosabelle"*].

"They have given thee to a plumber,
They have broken every vow,
They have given thee to a plumber,
And my heart, my heart is breaking now."

[*Drops into chair again.*]

Now, gentlemen!

[SAM *thrusts circulars into his pocket, and turns away angrily.*]

POLLY. You know, father, you can come and see me. [*Leans over him.*]

SAM [*sotto voce*]. No, no.

[*Motions to* POLLY.]

ECCLES [*looking up*]. So I can, and that's a comfort. [*Shaking her hand.*] And you can come and see me, and that's a comfort. I'll come and see you often — very often — every day [SAM *turns up stage in horror*], and crack a fatherly bottle [*rising*], and shed a friendly tear.

[*Wipes eyes with dirty pocket-handkerchief, which he pulls from breast pocket.*]

POLLY. Do, father, do.

[*Goes up and gets tea-tray.*]

SAM [*with a gulp*]. Yes, Mr. Eccles, do.

[*Goes to* POLLY *and gesticulates behind tray.*]

ECCLES. I will. [*Goes to center of stage.*] And this it is to be a father. I would part with any of my children for their own good, readily — if I was paid for it. [*Goes to right corner; sings.*] "For I know that the angels are whispering to me" — me, gentlemen!

[POLLY *gets tea-things.*]

SAM. I'll try and make Polly a good husband, and anything that I can do to prove it [*lowering his voice*], in the way of spirituous liquors and tobacco [*slipping coin into his hand, unseen by* POLLY], shall be done.

ECCLES [*lightening up and placing his left hand on* SAM'S *head*].

"Be kind to thy father,
Wherever you be,
For he is a blessing
And credit to thee" — thee, gentlemen.

[*Gets to center of stage.*] Well, my children — bless you, take the blessings of a gray-'aired father. [POLLY *looking from one to the other.*] Samuel Gerridge, she shall be thine. [*Mock heroically, looking at money.*] You shall be his wife [*looking at* POLLY] and you [*looking at* SAM] shall be her husband — for a husband I know no fitter — no fitter "gas-fitter" man. [*Runs to piano and takes hat; goes to door, looks comically pathetic at* SAM *and* POLLY, *puts on hat and comes toward center of stage.*] I've a friend waiting for me round the corner, which I want to have a word with; and may you never know how much more sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a marriageable daughter. [*Sings.*]

"When I heard she was married,
I breathed not a tone,
The heyes of all round me
Was fixed on my h'own.
I flew to my chamber
To hide my despair,
I tore the bright circlet
Of gems from my hair.
When I heard she was married,
When I heard she was married—"

[*Breaks down. Exit.*]

POLLY [*drying her eyes*]. There, Sam. I always told you that though father had his faults, his heart was in the right place.

SAM. Poor Polly.

[*Crosses to fireplace. Knock at door.*]

POLLY [*top of table*]. Come in.

[*Enter* HAWTREE.]

POLLY. Major Hawtree.

[SAM *turns away as they shake hands.*]

HAWTREE. I met the Marquise's carriage on the bridge. Has she been here?

[SAM *at fire, with back to it.*]

POLLY. Yes.

HAWTREE. What happened?

POLLY. Oh, she wanted to take away the child. [*At head of table.*]

SAM. In the coach.

[POLLY *sets tea-things.*]

HAWTREE. And what did Mrs. D'Alroy say to that?

SAM. Mrs. D'Alroy said that she'd see 'er blowed first! [POLLY *pushes* SAM]—or words to that effect.

HAWTREE. I'm sorry to hear this; I had hoped—however, that's over.

POLLY [*sitting at table*]. Yes, it's over; and I hope we shall hear no more about it. Want to take away the child, indeed—like her impudence! What next! [*Getting ready tea-things.*] Esther's gone to lie down. I shan't wake her up for tea, though she's had nothing to eat all day.

SAM [*head of table*]. Shall I fetch some shrimps?

POLLY. No. What made you think of shrimps?

SAM. They're a relish, and consolin'—at least I always found 'em so.

[*Check lights, gradually.*]

POLLY. I won't ask you to take tea with us, Major—you're too grand.

[SAM *motions approbation to* POLLY, *not wanting* HAWTREE *to remain.*]

HAWTREE [*placing hat on piano*]. Not at all. I shall be most happy. [*Aside.*] 'Pon my word, these are very good sort of people. I'd no idea—

SAM [*points to* HAWTREE]. He's a-goin' to stop to tea—well, I ain't.

[*Goes up to window and sits.* HAWTREE *crosses and sits opposite* POLLY *at table.*]

POLLY. Sam! Sam! [*Pause*—SAM *says* Eh?] Pull down the blind and light the gas.

SAM. No, don't light up; I like this sort of dusk. It's unbusiness-like, but pleasant.

[SAM *cuts enormous slice of bread and hands it on point of knife to* HAWTREE. *Cuts small lump of butter and hands it on point of knife to* HAWTREE, *who looks at it through eyeglass, then takes it.* SAM *then helps himself.* POLLY *meantime has poured out tea in two cups, and one saucer for* SAM, *sugars them, and then hands cup and saucer to* HAWTREE, *who has both hands full. He takes it awkwardly and places it on table.* POLLY, *having only one spoon, tastes* SAM'S *tea, then stirs* HAWTREE'S, *attracting his attention by doing so. He looks into his tea-cup.* POLLY *stirs her own tea, and drops spoon into* HAWTREE'S *cup, causing it to spurt in his eye. He drops eyeglass and wipes his eyes.*]

POLLY [*making tea*]. Sugar, Sam! [SAM *takes tea and sits facing fire.*] Oh there isn't any milk—it'll be here directly, it's just his time.

VOICE [*outside; rattle of milk-pails*] Mia-oow!

POLLY. There he is. [*Knock at door.*] Oh, I know; I owe him fourpence [*Feeling in her pocket.*] Sam, have you got fourpence?

[*Knock again, louder.*]

SAM. No [*his mouth full*]—I ain't got no fourpence.

POLLY. He's very impatient. Come in!

[*Enter* GEORGE, *his face bronzed, and in full health. He carries a milk-can in his hand, which, after putting his hat on piano, he places on table.*]

GEORGE. A fellow hung this on the railings, so I brought it in.

[POLLY *sees him, and gradually sinks down under table on one side. Then,* SAM, *with his mouth full, and bread and butter in hand, does the same on the other.* HAWTREE *pushes himself back a space, in chair; remains motionless.* GEORGE *astonished. Picture.*]

GEORGE. What's the matter with you?

HAWTREE [*rising*]. George!

GEORGE. Hawtree! You here?

POLLY [*under table*]. O-o-o-h! the ghost! the ghost!

SAM. It shan't hurt you, Polly. Perhaps it's only indigestion.

HAWTREE. Then you are not dead?

GEORGE. Dead, no. Where's my wife?

HAWTREE. You were reported killed.

GEORGE. It wasn't true.

HAWTREE. Alive! My old friend alive!

GEORGE. And well. [*Shakes hands.*] Landed this morning. Where's my wife?

SAM [*who has popped his head from under the tablecloth*]. He ain't dead, Poll — he's alive.

[POLLY *rises from under table slowly.*]

POLLY [*pause; approaches him, touches him, retreats*]. George! [*He nods.*] George! George!

GEORGE. Yes! Yes!

POLLY. Alive! My dear George! Oh, my brother! [*Looking at him intensely.*] Alive! [*Going to him.*] Oh, my dear, dear brother [*In his arms*] — how could you go and do so?

[*Laughs hysterically.*]

[SAM *goes to* POLLY. GEORGE *places* POLLY *in* SAM'S *arms.* SAM *kisses* POLLY'S *hand violently.* HAWTREE *comes up, stares — business.* SAM *with a stamp of his foot moves away.*]

GEORGE. Where's Esther?

HAWTREE. Here — in this house.

GEORGE. Here! — doesn't she know I'm back?

POLLY. No — how should she?

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. Didn't you get my telegram?

HAWTREE. No; where from?

GEORGE. Southampton! I sent it to the Club.

HAWTREE. I haven't been there these three days.

POLLY [*hysterically*]. Oh, my dear, dear, dear dead-and-gone, come-back-all-alive-oh, brother George!

[GEORGE *passes her.*]

SAM. Glad to see yer, sir.

GEORGE. Thank you, Gerridge. [*Shakes hands.*] Same to you — but Esther?

POLLY [*back to audience, and 'kerchief to her eyes*]. She's asleep in her room.

[GEORGE *is going;* POLLY *stops him.*]

POLLY. You mustn't see her.

GEORGE. Not see her! — after this long absence! — why not?

HAWTREE. She's ill to-day. She has been greatly excited. The news of your death, which we all mourned, has shaken her terribly.

GEORGE. Poor girl! Poor girl!

POLLY. Oh, we all cried so when you died! — [*crying*] — and now you're alive again, I want to cry ever so much more.

[*Crying.*]

HAWTREE. We must break the news to her gently and by degrees.

[*Crosses behind, to fire, taking his tea with him.*]

SAM. Yes, if you turn the tap on to full pressure, she'll explode.

[SAM *turns to* HAWTREE, *who is just raising cup to his lips and brings it down on saucer with a bang; both annoyed.*]

GEORGE. To return, and not to be able to see her — to love her — to kiss her!

[*Stamps.*]

POLLY. Hush!

GEORGE. I forgot — I shall wake her!

POLLY. More than that — you'll wake the baby.

GEORGE. Baby! — what baby?

POLLY. Yours.

GEORGE. Mine? — mine?

POLLY. Yes — yours and Esther's. Why, didn't you know there was a baby?

GEORGE. No!

POLLY. La! the ignorance of these men!

HAWTREE. Yes, George, you're a father. [*At fireplace.*]

GEORGE. Why wasn't I told of this? Why didn't you write?

POLLY. How could we when you were dead?

SAM. And 'adn't left your address.

[*Looks at* HAWTREE, *who turns away quickly.*]

GEORGE. If I can't see Esther, I will see the child. The sight of me won't be too much for its nerves. Where is it?

POLLY. Sleeping in its mother's arms. [GEORGE *goes to door — she intercepts him.*] Please not! Please not!

GEORGE. I must! I will!

POLLY. It might kill her, and you wouldn't like to do that. I'll fetch the baby; but, oh, please don't make a noise. [*Going up.*] You won't make a noise — you'll be as quiet as you can, won't you? Oh! I can't believe it!

[*Exit* POLLY. SAM *dances breakdown and finishes up by looking at* HAWTREE, *who turns away astonished.* SAM *disconcerted; sits on chair by table;* GEORGE *at door.*]

GEORGE. My baby — my ba — It's a dream! [*To* SAM.] You've seen it — what's it like?

SAM. Oh! it's like a — like a sort of — infant — white and — milky, and all that.

[*Enter* POLLY *with baby wrapped in shawls;* GEORGE *shuts door and meets her.*]

POLLY. Gently! gently — take care! Esther will hardly have it touched.

[SAM *rises and gets near to* GEORGE.]

GEORGE. But I'm its father.

POLLY. That don't matter. She's very particular.

GEORGE. Boy or girl?

POLLY. Guess.

GEORGE. Boy! [POLLY *nods.* GEORGE *proud.*] What's his name?

POLLY. Guess.

GEORGE. George? [POLLY *nods.*] Eustace? [POLLY *nods.*] Fairfax? Algernon? [POLLY *nods; pause.*] My names!

SAM [*to* GEORGE]. You'd 'ardly think there was room enough in 'im to 'old so many names, would yer?

[HAWTREE *looks at him — turns to fire.* SAM *disconcerted again. Sits.*]

GEORGE. To come back all the way from India to find that I'm dead, and that you're alive. To find my wife a widow with a new love aged — How old are you? I'll buy you a pony tomorrow, my brave little boy! What's his weight? I should say two pound nothing. My — baby — my boy! [*Bends over him and kisses him.*] Take him away, Polly, for fear I should break him.

[POLLY *takes child, and places it in cradle.*]

HAWTREE [*crosses to piano. Passes* SAM, *front — stares — business.* SAM *goes round to fireplace, flings down bread and butter in a rage and drinks his tea out of saucer.*] But tell us how it is you're back — how you escaped?

[HAWTREE *leans against piano.*]

GEORGE [*coming down*]. By and by. Too long a story just now. Tell *me* all about it. [POLLY *gives him chair.*] How is it Esther's living here?

POLLY. She came back after the baby was born, and the furniture was sold up.

GEORGE. Sold up? What furniture?

POLLY. That you bought for her.

HAWTREE. It couldn't be helped, George — Mrs. D'Alroy was so poor.

GEORGE. Poor! But I left her £600 to put in the bank!

HAWTREE. We *must* tell you. She gave it to her father, who banked it in his own name.

SAM. And lost it bettin' — every copper.

GEORGE. Then she's been in want?

POLLY. No — not in want. Friends lent her money.

GEORGE [*seated*]. What friends? [*Pause; he looks at* POLLY, *who indicates* HAWTREE.] You?

POLLY. Yes.

GEORGE [*rising and shaking* HAWTREE'S *hand*]. Thank you, old fella.

[HAWTREE *droops his head.*]

SAM [*aside*]. Now who'd a thought that long swell 'ad it in 'im? 'E never mentioned it.

GEORGE. So Papa Eccles had the money?

[*Sitting again.*]

SAM. And blued it.

[*Sits on corner of table.*]

POLLY [*pleadingly*]. You see father was very unlucky on the race-course. He told us that if it hadn't been that all his calculations were upset by a horse winning who had no business to, he should have made our fortunes. Father's been unlucky, and he gets tipsy at times, but he's a very clever man, if you only give him scope enough.

SAM. I'd give 'im scope enough!

GEORGE. Where is he now?

SAM. Public-house.

GEORGE. And how is he?

SAM. Drunk!

[POLLY *pushes him off table.* SAM *sits at fireplace up stage.*]

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. You were right. There is *"something"* in caste. [*Aloud.*] But tell us all about it. [*Sits.*]

POLLY. Well, you know, you went away; and then the baby was born. Oh! he was such a sweet little thing, just like — your eyes — your hair. [*Standing by* GEORGE, *who is sitting.*]

GEORGE. Cut that!

POLLY. Well, baby came; and when baby was six days old, your letter came, Major [*to* HAWTREE]. I saw that it was from India, and that it wasn't in your hand [*to* GEORGE]; I guessed what was inside it, so I opened it unknown to her, and I read there of your capture and death. I daren't tell her. I went to father to ask his advice, but he was too tipsy to understand me. Sam fetched the doctor. He told us that the news would kill her. When she woke up, she said she had dreamed there was a letter from you. I told her, no; and day after day she asked for a letter. So the doctor advised us to write one as if it came from you. So we did. Sam and I and the doctor told her — told Esther, I mean — that her eyes were bad and she mustn't read, and we read our letter to her; didn't we, Sam? But, bless you! she always knew it hadn't come from you! At last, when she was stronger, we told her all.

GEORGE [*after a pause*]. How did she take it?

POLLY. She pressed the baby in her arms, and turned her face to the wall. [*A pause.*] Well, to make a long story short, when she got up, she found father had lost all the money you had left her. There was a dreadful scene between them. She told him he'd robbed her and her child, and father left the house, and swore he'd never come back again.

SAM. Don't be alarmed — 'e did come back. [*Sitting by fire.*]

POLLY. Oh, yes; he was too good-hearted to stop long from his children. He has his faults, but his good points, when you find 'em, are wonderful!

SAM. Yes, when you find 'em.

[*Rises, gets bread and butter from table, and sits at corner of table.*]

POLLY. So she had to come back here to us, and that's all.

GEORGE. Why didn't she write to my mother?

POLLY. Father wanted her; but she was too proud — she said she'd die first.

GEORGE [*rising, to* HAWTREE]. There's a woman! Caste's all humbug. [*Sees sword over mantelpiece.*] That's my sword [*crossing round*] and a map of India, and that's the piano I bought her — I'll swear to the silk.

POLLY. Yes; that was bought in at the sale.

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. Thank ye, old fella.

HAWTREE. Not by me — I was in India at the time.

GEORGE. By whom, then?

POLLY. By Sam. [SAM *winks to her to discontinue.*] I shall! He knew Esther was breaking her heart about anyone else having it, so he took the money he'd saved up for our wedding, and we're going to be married now — ain't we, Sam?

SAM [*rushing to* GEORGE *and pulling out circulars from his pocket*]. And hope by constant attention to business, to merit — [POLLY *pushes him away.*]

POLLY. Since you died it hasn't been opened, but if I don't play it to-night, may I die an old maid!

[*Goes up.* GEORGE *crosses to* SAM, *and shakes his hand, then goes up stage, pulls up blind, and looks into street.* SAM *turns up and meets* POLLY *by top of table.*]

HAWTREE [*aside*]. Now who'd have thought that little cad had it in him? He never mentioned it. [*Aloud.*] Apropos, George, your mother — I'll go to the Square, and tell her of —

[*Takes hat from piano.*]

GEORGE. Is she in town?

[*At cradle.*]

HAWTREE. Yes. Will you come with me?

GEORGE. And leave my wife? — and such a wife!

HAWTREE. I'll go at once. I shall catch her before dinner. Goodby, old fellow. Seeing you back again, alive and well, makes me feel quite — that I quite feel — [*Shakes* GEORGE'S *hand. Goes to door, then crosses to* SAM, *who has turned* POLLY'S *tea into his saucer, and is just about to drink; seeing* HAWTREE, *he puts it down quickly, and turns his back.*] Mr. Gerridge, I fear I have often made myself very offensive to you.

SAM. Well, sir, yer 'ave.

HAWTREE [*at bottom of table*]. I feared so. I didn't know you then. I beg your pardon. Let me ask you to shake hands — to forgive me, and forget it. [*Offering his hand.*]

SAM [*taking it*]. Say no more, sir; and if ever I've made myself offensive to you, I ask your pardon; forget it and forgive me. [*They shake hands warmly; as* HAWTREE *crosses to door, recovering from* SAM'S *hearty shake of the hand,* SAM *runs to him.*] Hi, sir! When yer marry that young lady as I know you're engaged to, if you should furnish a house, and require anything in my way —

[*He brings out circular; begins to read it.* POLLY *comes down and pushes* SAM *away, against* HAWTREE. SAM *goes and sits on low chair by fireplace, down stage, disconcerted, cramming circulars into his pocket.*]

HAWTREE. Goodby, George, for the present. [*At door.*] By, Polly. [*Resumes his Pall Mall manner as he goes out.*] I'm off to the Square. [*Exit.*]

GEORGE [*at cradle.*] But Esther?

POLLY [*meets* GEORGE]. Oh, I forgot all about Esther. I'll tell her all about it.

GEORGE. How? [*By door.*]

POLLY. I don't know; but it will come. Providence will send it to me, as it has sent you, my dear brother. [*Embracing him.*] You don't know how glad I am to see you back again! You must go. [*Pushing him.* GEORGE *takes hat off piano.*] Esther will be getting up directly. [*At door with* GEORGE, *who looks through keyhole.*] It's no use looking there; it's dark.

GEORGE [*at door*]. It isn't often a man can see his own widow.

POLLY. And it isn't often that he wants to! Now, you must go. [*Pushing him off.*]

GEORGE. I shall stop outside.

SAM. And I'll whistle for you when you may come in.

POLLY. Now — hush!

GEORGE [*opening door wide*]. Oh, my Esther, when you know I'm alive! I'll marry you all over again, and we'll have a second honeymoon, my darling.

[*Exit.*]

POLLY. Oh, Sam, Sam! [*Commencing to sing and dance.* SAM *also dances; they meet in center of stage, join hands, and dance around two or three times, leaving* SAM *on the left of* POLLY, *near table.* POLLY *going down.*] Oh, Sam, I'm so excited, I don't know what to do. What shall I do — what shall I do?

SAM [*taking up* HAWTREE'S *bread and butter*]. 'Ave a bit of bread and butter, Polly.

POLLY. Now, Sam, light the gas; I'm going to wake her up. [*Opening door.*] Oh, my darling, if I dare tell you! [*Whispering.*] He's come back! He's alive! He's come back! He's come back! Alive! Alive! Alive! Sam, kiss me!

[SAM *rushes to* POLLY, *kisses her, and she jumps off,* SAM *shutting the door.*]

SAM [*dances shutter-dance*]. I'm glad

the swells are gone; now I can open my safety-valve, and let my feelings escape. To think of 'is comin' back alive from India just as I am goin' to open my shop. Perhaps he'll get me the patronage of the Royal Family. It would look stunnin' over the door, a lion and a unicorn, a-standin' on their hind legs, doin' nothin' furiously, with a lozenge between 'em — thus. [*Seizes plate on table, puts his left foot on chair by table, and imitates the picture of the Royal arms.*] Polly said I was to light up, and whatever Polly says must be done. [*Lights brackets over mantelpiece, then candles; as he lights the broken one, says:*] Why this one is for all the world like old Eccles! [*Places candles on piano and sits on music-stool.*] Poor Esther! to think of my knowin' her when she was in the ballet line — then in the 'onorable line; then a mother — no, honorables is "mammas" — then a widow, and then in the ballet line again! — and 'im to come back [*growing affected*] — and find a baby, with all 'is furniture and fittin's ready for immediate use [*crossing back of table during last few lines, sits in chair left of table*] — and she, poor thing, lyin' asleep with 'er eyelids 'ot and swollen, not knowin' that that great big, 'eavy, 'ulkin', overgrown dragoon is prowlin' outside, ready to fly at 'er lips, and strangle 'er in 'is strong, lovin' arms — it — it — it —

[*Breaks down and sobs, with his head on the table.*]

[*Enter* POLLY]

POLLY. Why, Sam! What's the matter?

SAM [*rises and crosses*]. I dunno. The water's got into my meter.

POLLY. Hush! Here's Esther.

[*Enter* ESTHER. *They stop suddenly.* POLLY *down stage.*]

SAM [*singing and dancing*]. "Tiddy-titum," etc.

ESTHER [*sitting near fire, taking up costume and beginning to work*]. Sam, you seem in high spirits to-night!

SAM. Yes; yer see Polly and I are goin' to be married — and — and 'opes by bestowing a merit — to continue the favor —

POLLY [*who has kissed* ESTHER *two or three times*]. What are you talking about?

SAM. I don't know — I'm off my burner.

[*Brings music-stool.* POLLY *goes round to chair, facing* ESTHER.]

ESTHER. What's the matter with you to-night, dear? [*To* POLLY.] I can see something in your eyes.

SAM. P'raps it's the new furniture!

[*Sits on music-stool.*]

ESTHER. Will you help me with the dress, Polly?

[*They sit,* ESTHER *upper end, back of table,* POLLY *facing her, at lower end.*]

POLLY. It was a pretty dress when it was new—not unlike the one Mlle. Delphine used to wear. [*Suddenly clasping her hands.*] Oh!

ESTHER. What's the matter?

POLLY. A needle! [*Crosses to* SAM, *who examines finger.*] I've got it!

SAM. What — the needle — in your finger?

POLLY. No; an idea in my head!

SAM [*still looking at her finger*]. Does it 'urt?

POLLY. Stupid! [SAM, *still sitting on stool. Aloud.*] Do you recollect Mlle. Delphine, Esther?

ESTHER. Yes.

POLLY. Do you recollect her in that ballet that old Herr Griffenhaagen arranged? — *Jeanne la Folle; or The Return of the Soldier?*

ESTHER. Yes; will you do the fresh hem?

POLLY. What's the use? Let me see — how did it go? How well I remember the scene! — the cottage was on that side, the bridge at the back — then ballet of villagers, and the entrance of Delphine as Jeanne, the bride — tra-lal-lala-lala-lala [*sings and pantomimes,* SAM *imitating her*]. Then the entrance of Claude, the bridegroom — [*To* SAM, *imitating swell.*] How-de-do? how-de-do?

SAM [*rising*]. 'Ow are yer?

[*Imitating* POLLY, *then sitting again.*]

POLLY. Then there was the procession to church — the march of the soldiers over the bridge — [*sings and pantomimes*] — arrest of Claude, who is drawn for the conscription — [*business;* ESTHER *looks dreamily*], and is torn from the arms of his bride, at the church-porch. *Omnes* broken-hearted. This is *Omnes* broken-hearted. [*Pantomimes.*]

ESTHER. Polly, I don't like this; it brings back memories.

POLLY [*going to table and leaning her hands on it. Looks over at* ESTHER]. Oh, fuss about memories! — one can't mourn forever. [ESTHER *surprised.*] Everything in this world isn't sad. There's bad news — and there's good news sometimes — when we least expect it.

ESTHER. Ah! not for me.

POLLY. Why not?

ESTHER [*anxiously*]. Polly!

POLLY. Second Act. [*This is to be said quickly, startling* SAM, *who has been looking on the ground during last four or five lines.*] Winter — the Village Pump. This is the village pump [*pointing to* SAM, *seated by piano, on music-stool.* SAM *turns around on music-stool, disgusted.*] Entrance of Jeanne — now called Jeanne la Folle, because she has gone mad on account of the supposed loss of her husband.

SAM. The supposed loss?

POLLY. The supposed loss!

ESTHER [*dropping costume*]. Polly!

SAM [*aside to Polly*]. Mind!

POLLY. Can't stop now! Entrance of Claude, *who isn't dead,* in a captain's uniform — a cloak thrown over his shoulders.

ESTHER. Not dead!

POLLY. Don't you remember the ballet? Jeanne is mad, and can't recognize her husband; and don't, till he shows her the ribbon she gave him when they were betrothed. A bit of ribbon! Sam, have you got a bit of ribbon? Oh, that crape sword-knot, that will do.

[*Crosses down.* SAM *astonished.*]

ESTHER. Touch that!

[*Rising, coming down.*]

POLLY. Why not? — it's no use *now.*

ESTHER [*slowly, looking into* POLLY'S *eyes*]. You have heard of George — I know you have — I see it in your eyes. You may tell me — I can bear it — I can indeed — indeed I can. Tell me — he is not dead? [*Violently agitated.*]

POLLY. No!

ESTHER. No?

POLLY. No!

ESTHER [*whispers*]. Thank Heaven! [SAM *turns on stool, back to audience.*] You've seen him — I see you have! — I know it! — I feel it! I had a bright and happy dream — I saw him as I slept! Oh, let me know if he is near! Give me some sign — some sound — [POLLY *opens piano*] — some token of his life and presence!

[SAM *touches* POLLY *on the shoulder, takes hat, and exit. All to be done very quickly.* POLLY *sits immediately at piano and plays air softly — the same air played by* ESTHER, *Act II, on the treble only.*]

ESTHER [*in an ecstasy*]. Oh, my husband! come to me! for I know that you are near! Let me feel your arms clasp round me! Do not fear for me! — I can bear the sight of you! — [*door opens showing* SAM *keeping* GEORGE *back*] — it will not kill me! — George — love! Husband — come, oh, come to me!

[GEORGE *breaks away from* SAM, *and coming down behind* ESTHER *places his hands over her eyes; she gives a faint scream, and turning, falls in his arms.* POLLY *plays bass as well as treble of the air, forte, then fortissimo. She then plays at random, endeavoring to hide her tears. At last strikes piano wildly, and goes off into a fit of hysterical laughter, to the alarm of* SAM, *who, rushing down as* POLLY *cries, "Sam! Sam!" falls on his knees in front of her. They embrace,* POLLY *pushing him contemptuously away afterwards.* GEORGE *gets chair, sits, and* ESTHER *kneels at his feet — he snatches off* ESTHER'S *cap, and throws it up stage.* POLLY *goes left of* GEORGE, SAM *brings music-stool, and she sits.*]

ESTHER. To see you here again — to feel your warm breath upon my cheek — is it real, or am I dreaming?

SAM [*rubbing his head*]. No; it's real.

ESTHER [*embracing* GEORGE]. My darling!

SAM. My darling! [POLLY *on music-stool, which* SAM *has placed for her.* SAM, *kneeling by her, imitates* ESTHER — POLLY *scornfully pushes him away.*] But tell us — tell us how you escaped.

GEORGE. It's a long story, but I'll condense it. I was riding out, and suddenly found myself surrounded and taken prisoner. One of the troop that took me was a fella who had been my servant, and to whom I had done some little kindness. He helped me to escape, and hid me in a sort of cave, and for a long time used to bring me food. Unfortunately, he was ordered away; so he brought another Sepoy to look after me. I felt from the first this man meant to betray me, and I watched him like a lynx, during the one day he was with me. As evening drew on, a Sepoy picket was passing. I could tell by the look in the fella's eyes, he meant to call out as soon as they were near enough; so I seized him by the throat, and shook the life out of him.

ESTHER. You strangled him?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. Killed him — dead?

GEORGE. He didn't get up again.

[*Embraces* ESTHER.]

POLLY [*to* SAM]. You never go and kill Sepoys. [*Pushes him over.*]

SAM. No! I pay rates and taxes.

GEORGE. The day after, Havelock and his Scotchmen marched through the village, and I turned out to meet them. I was too done up to join, so I was sent straight on to Calcutta. I got leave, took a berth on the P. & O. boat; the passage restored me. I landed this morning, came on here, and brought in the milk.

[*Enter the* MARQUISE; *she rushes to embrace* GEORGE. *All rise,* SAM *putting stool back.*]

MARQUISE. My dear boy — my dear, dear boy!

POLLY. Why, see, she's crying! She's glad to see him alive and back again.

SAM [*profoundly*]. Well! There's always some good in women, even when they're ladies.

[*Goes up to window.* POLLY *puts dress in box, and goes to cradle; then beside* SAM.]

MARQUISE [*crossing to* ESTHER]. My dear daughter, we must forget our little differences. [*Kissing her.*] Won't you? How history repeats itself! You will find a similar and as unexpected a return mentioned by Froissart in the chapter that treats of Philip Dartnell —

GEORGE. Yes, mother — I remember—

[*Kisses her.*]

MARQUISE [*to* GEORGE, *aside*]. We must take her abroad, and make a lady of her.

GEORGE. Can't, mamma — she's ready-made. Nature has done it to our hands.

MARQUISE [*aside to* GEORGE]. But I won't have the man who smells of putty — [SAM, *business at back. He is listening, and at the word "putty" throws his cap irritably on table.* POLLY *pacifies him, and makes him sit down beside her on window*] — nor the man who smells of beer.

[*Goes to* ESTHER, *who offers her chair, and sits in chair opposite to her.* MARQUISE *back to audience,* ESTHER *facing audience.*]

[*Enter* HAWTREE, *pale.*]

HAWTREE. George! Oh, the Marchioness is here.

GEORGE. What's the matter?

HAWTREE. Oh, nothing. Yes, there is. I don't mind telling you. I've been thrown. I called at my chambers as I came along and found this.

[*Gives* GEORGE *a note. Sits on music-stool.*]

GEORGE. From the Countess, Lady Florence's mother. [*Reads.*] "Dear Major Hawtree: I hasten to inform you that my daughter Florence is about to enter into an alliance with Lord Saxeby, the eldest son of the Marquis of Loamshire. Under these circumstances, should you think fit to call here again, I feel assured —" Well, perhaps it's for the best. [*Returning letter.*] Caste! you

know. Caste! And a marquis is a bigger swell than a major.

HAWTREE. Yes, best to marry in your own rank of life.

GEORGE. If you can find *the* girl. But if you ever find *the* girl, marry her. As to her station—

"True hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

HAWTREE. Ya-as. But a gentleman should hardly ally himself to a nobody.

GEORGE. My dear fella, Nobody's a mistake—he don't exist. Nobody's nobody! Everybody's somebody!

HAWTREE. Yes. But still—Caste.

GEORGE. Oh, Caste's all right. Caste is a good thing if it's not carried too far. It shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar; but it should open the door very wide for exceptional merit. Let brains break through its barriers, and what brains can break through love may leap over.

HAWTREE. Yes. Why, George, you're quite inspired—quite an orator. What makes you so brilliant? Your captivity? The voyage? What then?

GEORGE. I'm in love with my wife!

[*Enter* ECCLES, *drunk, a bottle of gin in his hand.*]

ECCLES [*crossing to center of stage*]. Bless this 'appy company. May we 'ave in our arms what we love in our 'earts. [*Goes to head of table.* ESTHER *goes to cradle, back to audience.* POLLY *and* SAM, *half amused, half angry.* MARQUISE *still sitting in chair, back to audience.* HAWTREE *facing* ECCLES, GEORGE *up stage, leaning on piano in disgust.*] Polly, fetch wine-glasses—a tumbler will do for me. Let us drink a toast. Mr. Chairman [*to* MARQUISE], ladies and gentlemen—I beg to propose the 'ealth of our newly returned warrior, *my son-in-law.* [MARQUISE *shivers.*] The Right Honorable George De Alroy. Get glasses, Polly, and send for a bottle of sherry wine for my ladyship. *My* ladyship! My ladyship! M'lad'ship! [*She half turns to him.*] You and me'll have a drain together on the quiet. So delighted to see you under these altered circum—circum—circum—stangate.

[POLLY, *who has shaken her head at him to desist, in vain, very distressed.*]

SAM. Shove 'is 'ead in a bucket!

[*Exit in disgust.*]

HAWTREE [*aside to* GEORGE.]. I think I can abate this nuisance—at least, I can remove it.

[*Rises and crosses to* ECCLES, *who has got round to side of table, leaning on it. He taps* ECCLES *with his stick, first on right shoulder, then on left, and finally sharply on right.* ECCLES *turns round and falls on point of stick*—HAWTREE *steadying him.* GEORGE *crosses behind, to* MARQUISE, *who has gone to cradle*—*puts his arm round* ESTHER, *and takes her to mantelpiece.*]

HAWTREE. Mr. Eccles, don't you think that, with your talent for liquor, if you had an allowance of about two pounds a week, and went to Jersey, where spirits are cheap, that you could drink yourself to death in a year?

ECCLES. I think I could—I'm sure I'll try.

[*Goes up by table, steadying himself by it, and sits in chair by fire, with the bottle of gin.* HAWTREE *standing by fire.* ESTHER *and* POLLY *embracing. As they turn away from each other*—]

GEORGE [*coming across with* ESTHER]. Come and play me that air that used to ring in my ears as I lay awake, night after night, captive in the cave—you know.

[*He hands* ESTHER *to piano. She plays the air.*]

MARQUISE [*bending over cradle, at end*]. My grandson!

[ECCLES *falls off the chair in the last stage of drunkenness, bottle in hand.* HAWTREE, *leaning one foot on chair from which* ECCLES *has fallen, looks at him through eyeglass.* SAM *enters, and goes to* POLLY, *behind cradle, and, producing wedding ring from several papers, holds it up before her eyes.* ESTHER *plays until curtain drops.*]

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The Cassilis Engagement (St. John Hankin)
Agnes Bernauer (Friedrich Hebbel)
The Admirable Crichton (J. M. Barrie)

QUESTIONS ON "CASTE"

1. Comment on the stage directions.
2. Point out weaknesses in the plot.
3. Point out weaknesses in the characterization.
4. What is the problem of the play? Is a convincing solution offered?
5. Is the dialogue true to life?
6. How does Robertson secure an atmosphere of realism throughout most of the play?

SIR WILLIAM SCHWENK GILBERT

W. S. Gilbert was born in London in 1836. Although his father was a well-known novelist in his day, he never began writing until his more illustrious son had achieved literary fame. The fact that young Gilbert received part of his elementary schooling in France perhaps accounts for a Gallic quality of mind which he often exhibited. After graduating from King's College in 1856 and spending four years in the civil service, he began the study of law at the Inner Temple. He was called to the bar in 1864 and later became a magistrate. His primary interest, however, was in literature, for he had already become well known as a contributor to *Fun,* a rival of *Punch.* To *Fun* he contributed the *Bab Ballads,* among the most delightful humorous verse in English.

By 1866 he was writing burlesques, a dozen of which were produced within a few years. He next tried his hand at comedies in verse, *The Wicked World* and *Pygmalion and Galatea* being the most successful. Then followed a number of prose plays, most of them comedies distinguished by a whimsical, subtle humor, such as *Engaged* and *Sweethearts,* which have kept the stage to this day. In 1870 he began a collaboration of twenty years with Sir Arthur Sullivan that resulted in a series of comic operas known the world over; *H.M.S. Pinafore, The Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado, Patience,* and the others, have delighted audiences for fifty years and show few signs of losing their extraordinary popularity. Gilbert's droll humor, the very slightly acid irony, his ingenious rhymes and rhythms won him a public that accepted good-humoredly his satirical jabs. The fact that Gilbert's contemporaries applauded the delicious stabs at honored British institutions from the throne down to the "Bobby" reveals, perhaps, less smugness and complacency in the Victorians than we are wont to attribute to them. Gilbert not only helped rescue the English stage from the paltry adaptations of French farces to which it was almost completely abandoned, but brought to the theatre the richest humor since Sheridan.

Of *Sweethearts* there is not much to say. Slight as it is, it is almost the cream of English drama between Sheridan and Wilde. It has an undeniable savor and a delicate humor that can be described only by the adjective "Gilbertian," a word which seems to be a genuine addition to our language. In spite of its absurdly Victorian heroine and a humorous situation that has more tragic than comic aspects, the play never lapses into sentimentality, and hence never loses its charm.

SWEETHEARTS
(1874)

BY

W. S. GILBERT

CHARACTERS

Mr. Harry Spreadbrow
Wilcox (*a gardener*)
Miss Jenny Northcott
Ruth (*her maid servant*)

Act I: 1844, Spring.
Act II: 1874, Autumn.

SWEETHEARTS

ACT I

DATE—1844

SCENE.—*The Garden of a pretty Country Villa. The house is new, and the garden shows signs of having been recently laid out; the shrubs are small, and the few trees about are moderate in size; small creepers are trained against the house; an open country in the distance; a little bridge over a stream, forms the entrance to the garden.*

WILCOX *is discovered seated on edge of garden wheelbarrow, preparing his "bass" for tying up plants; he rises and comes down with sycamore sapling in his hand; it is carefully done up in matting, and has a direction label attached to it.*

WILCOX [*reading the label*]. "For Miss Northcott, with Mr. Spreadbrow's kindest regards." *"Acer Pseudo Plantanus."* Aye, aye! sycamore, I suppose, though it ain't genteel to say so. Humph! sycamores are common enough in these parts, there ain't no call, as I can see, to send a hundred and twenty mile for one. Ah, Mr. Spreadbrow, no go — no go; it ain't to be done with *"Acer Pseudo Plantanuses."* Miss Jenny's sent better men nor you about their business afore this, and as you're agoin' about your'n of your own free will to-night, and a good long way too, why I says, no go, no go! If I know Miss Jenny, she's a good long job, and you've set down looking at your work too long, and now that it's come to going, you'll need to hurry it, and Miss Jenny ain't a job to be hurried over, bless her. Take another three months, and I don't say there mightn't be a chance for you, but it'll take all that — ah, thank goodness, it'll take all that!

[*Enter* JENNY *from behind the house prepared for gardening.*]

JENNY. Well, Wilcox, what have you got there? [*He touches his forehead and gives her the sycamore.*] Not my sycamore?

WILCOX. Yes, miss; Mr. Spreadbrow left it last night as the mail passed.

JENNY. Then he's returned already? Why, he was not expected for a week at least.

WILCOX. He returned quite sudden last night, and left this here plant with a message that he would call at twelve o'clock to-day, miss.

JENNY. I shall be very glad to see him. So this is really a shoot of the dear old tree!

WILCOX. Come all the way from Lunnon, too. There's lots of 'em hereabouts miss; I could ha' got you a armful for the asking.

JENNY. Yes, I daresay; but this comes from the dear old house at Hampstead.

WILCOX. Do it, now?

JENNY. You remember the old sycamore on the lawn where Mr. Spreadbrow and I used to sit and learn our lessons years ago? — well, this is a piece of it. And as Mr. Spreadbrow was going to London, I asked him to be so kind as to call, and tell the new people, with his compliments, that he wanted to cut a shoot from it for a young lady who had a very pleasant recollection of many very happy hours spent under it. It was an awkward thing for a nervous young gentleman to do, and it's very kind of him to have done it. [*Gives back the plant which he places against upper porch of house.*] So he's coming this morning?

WILCOX. Yes, miss, to say good-bye.

JENNY [*Crosses to* L. *and busies herself at stand of flowers.*] Good-bye? "How d'ye do," you mean.

WILCOX. No, miss, good-bye. I hear Mr. Spreadbrow's off to Ingy.

JENNY. Yes; I believe he is going soon.

WILCOX. Soon? Ah, soon enough! He joins his ship at Southampton to-night —so he left word yesterday.

JENNY. To-night? No; not for some weeks yet. [*Alarmed.*]

WILCOX. To-night, miss. I had it from his own lips, and he's coming to-day to say good-bye.

JENNY [*aside*]. To-night!

WILCOX. And a good job too, say I, though he's a nice young gentleman too.

JENNY. I don't see that it's a good job.

WILCOX. I don't want no young gentlemen hanging about here, miss. I know what they comes arter;—they comes arter the flowers.

JENNY. The flowers? What nonsense!

WILCOX. No, it ain't nonsense. The world's a hap-hazard garden where common vegetables like me, and hardy annuals like my boys, and sour crabs like my old 'ooman, and pretty delicate flowers like you and your sisters grow side by side. It's the flowers they come arter.

JENNY. Really, Wilcox, if papa don't object I don't see what you have to do with it.

WILCOX. No, your pa' don't object; but I can't make your pa' out, miss. Walk off with one of his tuppenny toolips and he's your enemy for life. Walk off with one of his darters and he settles three hundred a year on you. Tell'ee what, miss: if I'd a family of grown gals like you, I'd stick a conservatory label on each of them—"Please not to touch the specimens!"—and I'd take jolly good care they didn't.

JENNY. At all events, if Mr. Spreadbrow is going away to-night you need not be alarmed on my account. I am a flower that is not picked in a minute.

WILCOX. Well said, miss! And as he *is* going, and as you won't see him no more, I don't mind saying that a better-spoken young gentleman I don't know. [*Approaching* JENNY *who is now seated in chair* L. *of table.*] A good honest straight-for-ard young chap he is—looks you full in the face with eyes that seem to say, "I'm a open book —turn me over—look me through and through—read every page of me, and if you find a line to be ashamed on, tell me of it, and I'll score it through."

JENNY [*demurely*]. I daresay Mr. Spreadbrow is much as other young men are.

WILCOX. As other young men? No, no —Lord forbid, miss! Come—say a good word for him, miss, poor young gentleman. He's said many a good word of you, I'll go bail.

JENNY. Of me?

WILCOX [*takes ladder which is leaning against the house and places it against upper porch of house, and going a little way up it, speaks this speech from it*—JENNY *remains seated, taking off her garden gloves and looking annoyed, she takes off her hat and places it on back of chair by table*]. Aye. Why only Toosday, when I was at work again the high road, he rides up on his little bay 'oss, and he stands talking to me over the hedge and straining his neck to catch a sight of you at a window, that was Toosday. "Well, Wilcox," says he, "it's a fine day!"—it rained hard Toosday, but it's always a fine day with him. "How's Miss Northcott?" says he. "Pretty well, sir," says I. "Pretty she always is; and well she ought to be if she's the best of hearts and the sweetest of natures will do it!" Well, I knew *that*, so off I goes to another subject, and tries to interest him in drainage and subsoils and junction pipes, but no, nothin' would do for him but he must bring the talk back to *you*. So at last I gets sick of it, and I up and says: "Look'ye here, Mr. Spreadbrow," says I, "I am only the gardener. This is Toosday and Miss Northcott's pa's in the study, and I dessay *he'll* be happy to hear what you've got to say about *her*. Lord it'd ha' done your heart good to see how he flushed up as he

stuck his spurs into the bay, and rode off fifteen mile to the hour! [*Laughing.*] That was Toosday.

JENNY [*very angrily*]. He had no right to talk about me to a servant.

WILCOX [*coming down from ladder*]. But bless you, don't be hard on him, he couldn't help it, miss. But don't you be alarmed, he's going away to-night, for many and many a long year, and you won't never be troubled with him again. He's going with a heavy heart, take my word for it, and I see his eyes all wet, when he spoke about sayin' good-bye to you; he'd the sorrow in his throat, but he's a brave lad, and he gulped it down, though it was as big as an apple. [*Ring.*] There he is. [*Going.*] Soothe him kindly, miss — don't you be afraid, you're safe enough now — he's a good lad, and he can't do no harm now.

[*Exit* WILCOX *over bridge.*]

JENNY. What does he want to go to-day for? he wasn't going for three months. He could remain if he liked; India has gone on very well without him for five thousand years, it could have waited three months longer; but men are always in such a hurry. He might have told me before — he *would* have done so, if he really, really liked me! I wouldn't have left *him* — yes I would — but then that's different. Well, if some people can go, some people can remain behind, and some other people will be only too glad to find *some people* out of their way!

[*Enter* SPREADBROW, *followed by* WILCOX.]

[JENNY *suddenly changes her manner, rises.*] Oh, Mr. Spreadbrow, how-d'ye-do? Quite well? I'm so glad! Sisters quite well? That's right—how kind of you to think of my tree! So you are really and truly going to India to-night? That *is* sudden!

SPREAD. Yes, very sudden — terribly sudden. I only heard of my appointment two days ago, in London, and I'm to join my ship to-night. It's very sudden indeed — and — and I've come to say good-bye.

JENNY. Good-bye.

[*Offering her hand.*]

SPREAD. Oh, but not like that, Jenny! Are you in a hurry?

JENNY. Oh, dear, no, I thought you were; won't you sit down? And so your sisters are quite well?

SPREAD. Not very; they are rather depressed at my going so soon. It may seem strange to you, but they will miss me.

JENNY. I'm sure they will. I should be terribly distressed at your going — if I were your sister. And you're going for so long!

SPREAD. I'm not likely to return for a great many years.

JENNY [*with a little suppressed emotion*]. I'm so sorry we shall not see you again. Papa will be very sorry.

SPREAD. More sorry than you will be?

JENNY. Well, no, I shall be very sorry, too — very, *very* sorry — there!

SPREAD. How very kind of you to say so.

JENNY. We have known each other so long — so many years, and we've always been good friends, and it's always sad to say good-bye for the last time [*he is delighted*] to anybody! [*he relapses*] It's so very sad when one knows for certain that it *must* be the last time.

SPREAD. I can't tell you how happy I am to hear you say it's so sad. But [*hopefully*] my prospects are not altogether hopeless, there's one chance for me yet. I'm happy to say I'm extremely delicate, and there's no knowing, the climate may not agree with me, and I may be invalided home.

[*Very cheerfully.*]

JENNY. Oh! but that would be very dreadful.

SPREAD. Oh, yes, of course it would be dreadful, in one sense; but it — it would have its advantages. [*Looking uneasily at* WILCOX, *who is hard at work.*] Wilcox is hard at work, I see.

JENNY. Oh, yes, Wilcox is hard at work. He is very industrious.

SPREAD. Confoundedly industrious! He is working in the sun without his hat.

[*Significantly.*]

JENNY. Poor fellow.

SPREAD. Isn't it injudicious, at his age?

JENNY. Oh, I don't think it will hurt him.

SPREAD. I really think it will.

[*He motions to her to send him away.*]

JENNY. Do you? Wilcox, Mr. Spreadbrow is terribly distressed because you are working in the sun.

WILCOX. That's mortal good of him. [*Aside, winking.*] They want me to go. All right; he can't do much harm now. [*Aloud.*] Well, sir, the sun is hot, and I'll go and look after the cucumbers away yonder, right at the other end of the garden.

[WILCOX *going* — SPREADBROW *is delighted.*]

JENNY. No, no, no! — don't go away! Stop here, only put on your hat. That's what Mr. Spreadbrow meant. [WILCOX *puts on his hat.*] There, *now* are you happy?

[*To* SPREADBROW, *who looks miserable.*]

SPREAD. I suppose it will soon be his dinner time?

JENNY. Oh, he *has* dined. You *have* dined, haven't you, Wilcox?

WILCOX. Oh, yes, miss, *I've* dined, thank'ye kindly.

JENNY. Yes; he has dined! Oh! I quite forgot!

SPREAD. What?

JENNY. I must interrupt you for a moment, Wilcox; I quite forgot that I promised to send some flowers to Captain Dampier this afternoon. Will you cut them for me?

WILCOX. Yes, miss. [*Knowingly.*] Out of the conservatory, I suppose, miss?

[WILCOX *going,* SPREADBROW *again delighted.*]

JENNY. No, these will do. [*Pointing to open-air flower beds* — SPREADBROW *again disappointed.*] Stop, on second thoughts perhaps you *had* better take them out of the conservatory, and cut them carefully — there's no hurry.

WILCOX [*aside*]. *I* understand! Well, poor young chap, let him be, let him be; he's going to be turned off to-night, and his last meal may as well be a hearty one. [*Exit.*]

SPREAD [*rises in great delight*]. How good of you — how very kind of you!

JENNY. To send Captain Dampier some flowers?

SPREAD [*much disappointed*]. Do you really want to send that fellow some flowers?

JENNY. To be sure I do. Why should I have asked Wilcox to cut them?

SPREAD. I thought — I was a great fool to think so — but I thought it might have been because we could talk more pleasantly alone.

JENNY. I really wanted some flowers; but as you say, we certainly can talk more pleasantly alone.

[*She busies herself with preparing the sycamore.*]

SPREAD. I've often thought that nothing is such a check on — pleasant conversation — as the presence of — of — a gardener — who is not interested in the subject of conversation.

JENNY [*gets the tree and cuts off the matting with which it is bound, with garden scissors which she has brought with her from the table*]. Oh, but Wilcox is very interested in everything that concerns you. Do let me call him back.

[*About to do so.*]

SPREAD. No, no; not on my account!

JENNY. He and I were having quite a discussion about you when you arrived.

[*Digging a hole for tree.*]

SPREAD. About me?

JENNY. Yes; indeed we almost quarrelled about you.

SPREAD. What, was he abusing me then?

JENNY. Oh, no; he was speaking of you in the highest terms.

SPREAD [*much taken aback*]. Then — *you* were abusing me!

JENNY. N — no, not exactly *that;* I — I didn't agree with all he said — [*he is much depressed, she notices this*] at least, not openly.

SPREAD [*hopefully*]. Then you did secretly?

JENNY. I shan't tell you.

SPREAD. Why?

JENNY. Because it will make you dreadfully vain. There!

SPREAD [*delighted*]. Very — very dreadfully vain?

[*He takes her hand.*]

JENNY. Very dreadfully vain indeed. Don't!

[*Withdraws her hand — during this she is digging the hole kneeling on the edge of the flower bed, he advances to her and kneels on edge of bed near her.*]

SPREAD. Do you know it's most delightful to hear you say that? It's without exception the most astonishingly pleasant thing I've ever heard in the whole course of my life! [*Sees the sycamore.*] Is that the tree I brought you?

[*Rises from his knees.*]

JENNY. Yes. I'm going to plant it just in front of the drawing-room window, so that I can see it whenever I look out. Will you help me? [*He prepares to do so — she puts it into the hole.*] Is that quite straight? Hold it up, please, while I fill in the earth. [*He holds it while she fills in the earth — gradually his hand slips down till it touches hers.*] It's no use, Mr. Spreadbrow, our both holding it in the same place!

[*He runs his hand up the stem quickly.*]

SPREAD. I beg your pardon — very foolish of me.

JENNY. Very.

SPREAD. I'm very glad there will be something here to make you think of me when I'm many, many thousand miles away, Jenny. For I shall be always thinking of *you.*

JENNY. Really, now that's very nice! It will be so delightful, and so odd to know that there's somebody thinking about me right on the other side of the world!

SPREAD [*sighing*]. Yes. It *will* be on the other side of the world!

JENNY. But that's the delightful part of it — right on the other side of the world! It will be such fun!

SPREAD. Fun!

JENNY. Of course, the farther you are away the funnier it will seem. [*He is approaching her again.*] Now keep on the other side of the world. It's just the distance that gives the point to it. There are dozens and dozens of people thinking of me close at hand. [*She rises.*]

SPREAD [*taking her hand*]. But not as I think of you, Jenny — dear, dear Jenny, not as I've thought of you for years and years, though I never dared tell you so till now. I can't bear to think that anybody else is thinking of you kindly, earnestly, seriously, as I think of you.

JENNY [*earnestly*]. You may be quite sure, Harry, quite, quite sure that you will be the only one who is thinking of me kindly, seriously, and earnestly [*he is delighted*] in India.

[*He relapses — she withdraws her hand.*]

SPREAD. And when this tree, that we have planted together, is a big tree, you must promise me that you will sit under it every day, and give a thought now and then to the old play-fellow who gave it to you.

JENNY. A big tree! Oh, but this little plant will never live to be a big tree, surely?

SPREAD. Yes, if you leave it alone, it grows very rapidly.

JENNY. Oh, but I'm not going to have a big tree right in front of the drawing-room window! It will spoil the view, it will be an eyesore. We had better plant it somewhere else.

SPREAD [*bitterly*]. No, let it be, you can cut it down when it becomes an eyesore. It grows very rapidly, but it will, no doubt, have lost all interest in your eyes long before it becomes an eyesore.

JENNY. But Captain Dampier says that a big tree in front of a window checks the current of fresh air.

SPREAD. Oh, if Captain Dampier says so, remove it.

JENNY. Now don't be ridiculous about Captain Dampier; I've a very great respect for his opinion on such matters.

SPREAD. I'm sure you have. You see a great deal of Captain Dampier, don't you?

JENNY. Yes, and we shall see a great deal more of him; he's going to take the Grange next door.

SPREAD [*bitterly*]. That will be very convenient.

JENNY [*demurely*]. Very.

SPREAD [*jealously*]. You seem to admire Captain Dampier very much.

JENNY. I think he is very good-looking. Don't you?

SPREAD. He's well enough — for a small man.

JENNY. Perhaps he'll grow.

SPREAD. Is Captain Dampier going to live here always?

JENNY. Yes, until he marries.

SPREAD. [*eagerly*]. Is — is he likely to marry?

JENNY. I don't know. [*Demurely.*] Perhaps he may.

SPREAD. But whom — whom?

JENNY [*bashfully*]. Haven't you heard? I thought you knew!

SPREAD [*excitedly*]. No, no, I don't know; I've heard nothing. Jenny — dear Jenny — tell me the truth, don't keep anything from me, don't leave me to find it out; it will be terrible to hear of it out there; and, if you have ever liked me, and I'm sure you have, tell me the whole truth at once!

JENNY [*bashfully*]. Perhaps, as an old friend, I ought to have told you before; but indeed, indeed I thought you knew. Captain Dampier is engaged to be married to — to — my cousin Emmie.

SPREAD. [*intensely relieved*]. To your cousin Emmie. Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you! Oh, my dear, dear Jenny, do — do let me take your hand.

[*Takes her hand and shakes it enthusiastically.*]

JENNY. Are you going?

SPREAD. No. [*Releasing it — much cast down.*] I was going to ask you to do me a great favor, and I thought I could ask it better if I had hold of your hand. I was going to ask you if you would give me a flower — any flower, I don't care what it is.

JENNY [*affecting surprise*]. A flower? Why, of course I will. But why?

SPREAD. [*earnestly*]. That I may take a token of you and of our parting wherever I go, that I may possess an emblem of you that I shall never — never part with, that I can carry about with me night and day wherever I go, throughout my whole life.

JENNY [*apparently much affected, crosses slowly to* R., *stoops and takes up large geranium in pot*]. Will this be too big?

SPREAD. [*disconcerted*]. But I mean a flower — only a flower.

JENNY. Oh, but do have a bunch! Wilcox shall pick you a beauty.

SPREAD. No, no; I want you to pick it for me. I don't care what it is — a daisy will do — if *you* pick it for me!

JENNY. What an odd notion! There! [*picking a flower and giving it to him*] will that do?

SPREAD. I can't tell you how inestimably I shall prize this flower. I will keep it while I live, and whatever good fortune may be in store for me, nothing can ever be so precious in my eyes.

JENNY. I had no idea you were so fond of flowers. Oh, do have some more!

SPREAD. No, no — but — you must let me give you this in return; I brought it for you, Jenny dear — dear Jenny! Will you take it from me?

[*Takes a rose from his button hole, and offers it.*]

JENNY [*amused and surprised*]. Oh, yes!

[*Takes it and puts it down on the table carelessly — he notices this with much emotion.*]

SPREAD. Well, I've got to say good-bye; there's no reason why it shouldn't be said at once. [*Holding out his hand.*] Good-bye, Jenny!

JENNY [*cheerfully*]. Good-bye!

[*He stands for a moment with her hand in his — she crosses to porch.*]

SPREAD. Haven't — haven't you anything to say to me?

JENNY [*after thinking it over*]. No, I don't think there's anything else. No — nothing.

[*She leans against the porch — he stands over her.*]

SPREAD. Jenny, I'm going away to-day, for years and years, or I wouldn't say what I'm going to say — at least not yet. I'm little more than a boy, Jenny; but if I were eighty, I couldn't be more in earnest — indeed I couldn't! Parting for

so many years is like death to me; and if I don't say what I'm going to say before I go, I shall never have the pluck to say it after. We were boy and girl together, and — and I loved you then — and every year I've loved you more and more; and now that I'm a man, and you are nearly a woman, I — I, Jenny dear — I've nothing more to say!

JENNY. How you astonish me!

SPREAD. Astonish you? Why, you know that I loved you.

JENNY. Yes, yes; as a boy loves a girl — but now that I am a woman it's impossible that you can care for me.

SPREAD. Impossible — because you are a woman!

JENNY. You see it's so unexpected.

SPREAD. Unexpected?

JENNY. Yes. As children it didn't matter, but it seems so shocking for grown people to talk about such things. And then, not gradually, but all at once — in a few minutes. It's awful!

SPREAD. Oh, Jenny, think. I've no time to delay — my having to go has made me desperate. One kind word from you will make me go away happy: without that word, I shall go in unspeakable sorrow. Jenny, Jenny, say one kind word!

JENNY [*earnestly*]. Tell me what to say.

SPREAD. It must come from you, my darling; say whatever is on your lips — whether for good or ill — I can bear it now.

JENNY. Well, then: I wish you a very, very pleasant voyage — and I hope you will be happy and prosperous — and you must take great care of yourself — and you can't think how glad I shall be to know that you think of me, now and then, in India. There!

SPREAD. Is that all?

JENNY. Yes, I think that's all. [*Reflectively.*] Yes — that's all.

SPREAD. Then — [*with great emotion which he struggles to suppress*] there's nothing left but to say good-bye — and I hope you will always be happy, and that, when you marry, you will marry a good fellow who will — who will — who will — good-bye! [*Exit, rapidly.*]

[JENNY *watches him out — sits down, leaving the gate open — hums an air gaily — looks round to see if he is coming back — goes on humming — takes up the flower he has given her — plays with it — gradually falters, and at last bursts into tears, laying her head on the table over the flower he has given her, and sobbing violently as the Curtain falls.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The Same as in Act I., with such additions and changes as may be supposed to have taken place in thirty years. The house, which was bare in Act I., is now entirely covered with Virginia and other creepers; the garden is much more fully planted than in Act I., and trees that were small in Act I. are tall and bushy now; the general arrangement of the garden is the same, except that the sycamore planted in Act I. has developed into a large tree, the boughs of which roof in the stage; the landscape has also undergone a metamorphosis, inasmuch as that which was open country in Act I. is now covered with picturesque semi-detached villas, and there are indications of a large town in the distance. The month is September, and the leaves of the Virginia creepers wear their Autumn tint.*

[JENNY *discovered seated on a bench at the foot of the tree, and* RUTH *is standing by her side, holding a skein of cotton, which* JENNY *is winding.* JENNY *is now a pleasant-looking middle-aged lady.*]

JENNY. Have you any fault to find with poor Tom?

RUTH. No, miss, I've no fault to find with Tom. But a girl can't marry every young man she don't find fault with, can she now, miss?

JENNY. Certainly not, Ruth. But

Tom seems to think you have given him some cause to believe that you are fond of him.

RUTH [*bridling up*]. It's like his impudence, miss, to say so! Fond of *him* indeed!

JENNY. He hasn't said so, Ruth, but I'm quite sure he thinks so. I have noticed of late that you have taken a foolish pleasure in playing fast and loose with poor Tom, and this has made him very unhappy, very unhappy indeed, so much so that I think it is very likely that he will make up his mind to leave my service altogether.

RUTH [*piqued*]. Oh, miss, if Tom can make up his mind to go, I'm sure *I* wouldn't stand in his way for worlds.

JENNY. But I think you would be sorry if he did.

RUTH. Oh yes, miss, I should be sorry to part with Tom!

JENNY. Then I think it's only right to tell you that the foolish fellow talks about enlisting for a soldier, and if he does it at all, he will do it to-night.

RUTH [*with some emotion*]. Oh, miss, for that, I do like Tom very much indeed; but if he wants to 'list, of course he's his own master, and, if he's really fond of me what does he want to go and 'list for? [*Going to cry.*] One would think he would like to be where he could talk to me, and look at me — odd times! I'm sure I don't want Tom to go and 'list!

JENNY. Then take the advice of an old lady, who knows something of these matters, and tell him so before it's too late — you foolish — foolish girl! Ah, Ruth, I've no right to be hard on you! I've been a young and foolish girl like yourself in my time, and I've done many thoughtless things that I've learnt to be very sorry for. I'm not reproaching you — but I'm speaking to you out of the fulness of my experience, and take my word for it, if you treat poor Tom lightly, you may live to be very sorry for it too! [*Taking her hand.*] There, I'm not angry with you, my dear, but if I'd taken the advice I'm giving you, I shouldn't be a lonely old lady at a time of life when a good husband has his greatest value. [*Ring.*] Go and see who's at the gate!

[*Exit* JENNY — RUTH *goes to the gate, wiping her eyes on her apron — she opens it.*]

[*Enter* SPREADBROW (*now* SIR HENRY)]

SPREAD. My dear, is this Mr. Braybrook's?

RUTH. Yes, sir.

SPREAD. Is he at home?

RUTH. No, sir, he is not; but mistress is.

SPREAD. Will you give your mistress my card? [*Feeling for his card case.*] Dear me, I've left my cards at home — never mind — will you tell your mistress that a gentleman will be greatly indebted to her, if she will kindly spare him a few minutes of her time? Do you think you can charge yourself with that message?

RUTH. Mistress is in the garden, sir, I'll run and tell her if you'll take a seat.

[*Exit* RUTH.]

SPREAD. That's a good girl! [*He sits on seat.*] I couldn't make up my mind to pass the old house without framing an excuse to take a peep at it. [*Looks round.*] Very nice — very pretty — but, dear me, on a very much smaller scale than I fancied. Remarkable changes in thirty years! [*Rises and walks round tree, looking about.*] Why the place is a town, and a railway runs right through it. And this is really the old garden in which I spent so many pleasant hours? Poor little Jenny! — I wonder what's become of her? Pretty little girl, but with a tendency to stoutness; if she's alive, I'll be bound she's fat. So this is Mr. Braybrook's, is it? I wonder who Braybrook is — I don't remember any family of that name hereabouts. [*Looking off.*] This, I suppose, is Mrs. Braybrook. Now, how in the world am I to account for my visit?

[*Enter* JENNY — *she curtseys formally, he bows.*]

I beg your pardon, I hardly know how to explain this intrusion. Perhaps I had better state my facts, they will plead my apology: — I am an old Indian civilian,

who, having returned to England after many years' absence, is whiling away a day in his native place, and amusing himself with polishing old memories — bright enough once, but sadly tarnished — sadly tarnished!

JENNY. Indeed? May I hope that you have succeeded?

SPREAD. Indifferently well — indifferently well. The fact is, I hardly know where I am, for all my old landmarks are swept away; I assure you I am within the mark, when I say that this house is positively the only place I can identify.

JENNY. The town has increased very rapidly of late.

SPREAD. Rapidly! When I left, there were not twenty houses in the place, but [*politely*] that was long before your time. I left a village, I find a town — I left a beadle, I find a mayor and corporation — I left a pump, I find a statue to a borough member. The inn is a "Palace Hotel Company —" the almshouse a county jail — the pound is a police station, and the Common a colony of semi-detached bungalows! Everything changed, including myself — everything new, except myself — ha, ha!

JENNY. I shall be glad to offer you any assistance in my power. I should be a good guide, for I have lived here thirty-two years!

SPREAD. Thirty-two years! is it possible? Then surely I ought to know you? [*He feels for his glasses.*] My name is Spreadbrow — Sir Henry Spreadbrow!

JENNY. Spreadbrow! [*Putting on spectacles.*] Is it possible? Why, my very dear old friend [*offering both her hands*], don't you recollect me?

SPREAD. [*he puts on his double eyeglass, takes both her hands*]. God bless me! — is it possible! — and this is really you! — you don't say so! Dear me, dear me! Well, well, well! I assure you I am delighted, most unaffectedly delighted, to renew our friendship!

[*Shaking hands again — they sit under tree — look at each other curiously.*]

SPREAD. Not changed a bit. My dear Jane, you really must allow me. [*They shake hands again.*] And now tell me, how is Mr. Braybrook?

JENNY [*rather surprised*]. Oh, Mr. Braybrook is very well; I expect him home presently; he will be very glad to see you, for he has often heard me speak of you.

SPREAD. Has he indeed? It will give me the greatest — the very greatest possible pleasure, believe me [*very emphatically*], to make his acquaintance.

JENNY [*still surprised at his emphatic manner*]. I'm sure he will be delighted.

SPREAD. Now tell me all about yourself. Any family?

JENNY [*puzzled*]. I beg your pardon?

SPREAD. Any family?

JENNY. Mr. Braybrook?

SPREAD. Well — yes —

JENNY. Mr. Braybrook is a bachelor.

SPREAD. A bachelor? Then let me understand — am I not speaking to Mrs. Braybrook?

JENNY. No, indeed, you are not! Ha, ha! [*Much amused.*] Mr. Braybrook is my nephew; the place belongs to him now.

SPREAD. Oh! Then, my dear Jane, may I ask who you are?

JENNY. I am not married —

SPREAD. Not married!

JENNY. No; I keep house for my nephew.

SPREAD. Why, you don't mean to sit there and look me in the face and tell me, after thirty years, that you are still Jane Northbrook?

JENNY [*rather hurt at the mistake*]. Northcott.

SPREAD. Northcott, of course. I beg your pardon — I should have said Northcott. And you are not Mrs. Braybrook? You are not even married! Why what were they about — what were they about? Not married! Well, now do you know I am very sorry to hear that. I am really more sorry and disappointed than I can tell you. [*She looks surprised and rather hurt.*] You'd have made an admirable wife, Jane, and an admirable mother. I can't tell you how sorry I am to find that you are still

Jane Northbrook — I should say, Northcott.

JENNY. The same in name — much changed in everything else. [*Sighing.*]

SPREAD. Changed? Not a bit — I won't hear of it. I knew you the moment I saw you. We are neither of us changed. Mellowed perhaps — a little mellowed, but what of that? Who shall say that the blossom is pleasanter to look upon than the fruit? Not I for one, Jane — not I for one.

JENNY. Time has dealt very kindly with us, but we're old folks now, Henry Spreadbrow.

SPREAD. I won't allow it, Jane — I won't hear it. What constitutes youth? A head of hair? Not at all; I was as bald as an egg at five-and-twenty — babies are always bald. Eyesight? Some people are born blind. Years? Years are an arbitrary impertinence. Am I an old man or you an old woman, because the earth contrives to hurry round the sun in three hundred and sixty-five days? Why Saturn can't do it in thirty years. If I had been born on Saturn I should be two years old, ma'am — a public nuisance in petticoats. Let us be thankful that I was not born on Saturn. No — no, as long as I can ride to cover twice a week, walk my five-and-twenty miles without turning a hair, go to bed at twelve, get up at six, turn into a cold tub and like it, I'm a boy, Jane — a boy — a boy!

JENNY. And you are still unmarried?

SPREAD. I? Oh dear, yes — very much so. No time to think of marriage. Plenty of opportunity, mind, but no leisure to avail myself of it. I've had a bustling time of it I assure you, Jane, working hard at the Bar and on the Bench, with some success — with some success; and now that I've done my work, I throw myself back in my easy chair, fold my hands, cross my legs, and prepare to enjoy myself. Life is before me, and I'm going to begin it. Ha, ha! And so you are really Jane Northcott still?

JENNY. Still Jane Northcott.

SPREAD. I'm indignant to hear it — I assure you that I am positively indignant to hear it. You would have made some fellow so infernally happy; I'm sorry for that fellow's sake, I don't know him, but still I am sorry. Ah, I wish I had remained in England. I do wish, for the very first time since I left it, that I had remained in England.

JENNY. Indeed! And why!

SPREAD. Why? Because I should have done my best to remove that reproach from society. I should indeed, Jane! Ha, ha! After all it don't much matter, for you wouldn't have had me. Oh, yes! you had no idea of it; but, do you know, I've a great mind to tell you — I *will* tell you. Do you know I was in love with you at one time? Boy and girl, you know — boy and girl. Ha, ha! *you'd* no idea of it, but I was!

JENNY [*in wonder*]. Oh, yes; I knew it very well.

SPREAD. [*much astonished*]. You knew it? You knew that I was attached to you!

JENNY. Why of course I did!

SPREAD. Did you, indeed! Bless me, you don't say so! Now that's amazingly curious. Leave a woman alone to find *that* out! It's instinctive, positively instinctive. Now, my dear Jane, I'm a very close student of human nature, and in pursuit of that study I should like above all things to know by what signs you detected my secret admiration for you. [*Takes her hand.*]

JENNY. Why, bless the man! There was no mystery in the matter! You told me all it!

SPREAD. I told you all about it?

JENNY. Certainly you did — here, in this garden.

SPREAD. That I admired you — loved you?

JENNY. Most assuredly! Surely you've not forgotten it. [*He drops her hand.*] *I* haven't.

SPREAD. I remember that I had the impertinence to be very fond of you. I forgot that I had the impertinence to tell you so. I remember it now. I made a fool of myself. I remember it by that I told you that I adored you, didn't I? — that you were as essential to me as the air I breathed — that it was impos-

sible to support existence without you — that your name should be the most hallowed of earthly words, and so forth. Ha, ha! my dear Jane, before I'd been a week on board I was saying the same thing to a middle-aged governess whose name has entirely escaped me. [*She has exhibited signs of pleasure during the earlier part of this speech, and disappointment at the last two lines.*] What fools we make of ourselves!

JENNY. And of others!

SPREAD. Oh, I meant it, Jane, I meant every word I said to you.

JENNY. And the governess?

SPREAD. And the governess! I would have married you, Jane.

JENNY. And the governess?

SPREAD. And the governess! I'd have married *her*, if she had accepted me — but she didn't. Perhaps it was as well — she was a widow with five children — I cursed my destiny at the time, but I've forgiven it since. I talked of blowing out my brains. I'm glad I didn't do it as I've found them useful in my profession. Ha! ha! [*Looking round.*] The place has changed a good deal since my time — improved — improved — we've all three improved. I don't quite like this tree though — it's in the way. What is it? A kind of beech, isn't it?

JENNY. No, it's a sycamore.

SPREAD. Ha! I don't understand English trees — but it's a curious place for a big tree like this, just outside the drawing-room window. Isn't it in the way?

JENNY. It *is* rather in the way.

SPREAD. I don't like a tree before a window, it checks the current of fresh air — don't you find that?

JENNY. It *does* check the current of fresh air.

SPREAD. Then the leaves blow into the house in autumn, and that's a nuisance — and besides it impedes the view.

JENNY. It is certainly open to those objections.

SPREAD. Then cut it down, my dear Jane. [*Crossing round behind tree.*] Why don't you cut it down?

JENNY. Cut it down! I wouldn't cut it down for worlds. That tree is identified in my mind with many happy recollections.

SPREAD. Remarkable the influence exercised by associations over a woman's mind. Observe — you take a house, mainly because it commands a beautiful view. You apportion the rooms principally with reference to that view. You lay out your garden at great expense to harmonize with that view, and having brought that view into the very best of all possible conditions for the full enjoyment of it, you allow a gigantic and wholly irrelevant tree to block it all out for the sake of the sentimental ghost of some dead and gone sentimental reality! Take my advice and have it down. If I had had anything to do with it, you would never have planted it. I shouldn't have allowed it!

JENNY. You had so much to do with it that it was planted there at your suggestion.

SPREAD. At mine? Never saw it before in my life.

JENNY. We planted it together thirty years ago — the day you sailed for India.

SPREAD. It appears to me that that was a very eventful day in my career. We planted it together? I have no recollection of having ever planted a gigantic sycamore anywhere. And we did it together! Why, it would take a dozen men to move it.

JENNY. It was a sapling then — you cut it for me.

SPREAD. [*suddenly and with energy*]. From the old sycamore in the old garden at Hampstead! Why, I remember; I went to London expressly to get it for you. [*Laughing — sitting on her left.*] And the next day I called to say good-bye and I found you planting it, and I helped; and as I was helping I found an opportunity to seize your hand. [*Does so.*] I grasped it — pressed it to my lips — [*does so*] and said, "My dear, dear Jenny" [*he drops her hand suddenly*], and so forth. Never mind *what* I said — but I meant it — I meant

it! [*Laughs heartily — she joins him, but her laughter is evidently forced — eventually she shows signs of tears which he doesn't notice.*] It all comes back with a distinctness which is absolutely photographic. I begged you to give me a flower — you gave me one — a sprig of geranium.

JENNY. Mignonette.

SPREAD. *Was* it mignonette? I think you're right — it was mignonette. I seized it — pressed it to my trembling lips — placed it next my fluttering heart, and swore that come what might I would never never part with it! I wonder what I did with that flower! — and then I took one from my button hole — begged you to take it — you took it, and — ha, ha, ha! — you threw it down carelessly on the table, and thought no more about it, you heartless creature — ha, ha, ha! Oh, I was very angry! I remember it perfectly, it was a camellia.

JENNY [*half crying — aside*]. Not a camellia, I think.

SPREAD. Yes, a camellia, a large white camellia.

JENNY. I don't think it was a camellia, I rather think it was a rose.

SPREAD. Nonsense, Jane — come, come, you hardly looked at it, miserable little flirt that you were; and you pretend, after thirty years, to stake your recollection of the circumstance against mine? No, no, Jane, take my word for it, it was a camellia.

JENNY. I'm sure it was a rose!

SPREAD. No, I'm sure it was a camellia.

JENNY [*in tears*]. Indeed — indeed it was a rose.

[*Produces a withered rose from a pocket-book — he is very much impressed — looks at it and at her, and seems much affected.*]

SPREAD. Why, Jane, my dear Jane, you don't mean to say that this is the very flower?

JENNY. That is the very flower!

[*Rising.*]

SPREAD. Strange! You seemed to attach no value to it when I gave it to you, you threw it away as something utterly insignificant; and when I leave, you pick it up, and keep it for thirty years! [*Rising.*] My dear Jane, how like a woman!

JENNY. And you seized the flower I gave you — pressed it to your lips, and swore that wherever your good or ill fortune might carry you, you would never part with it; and — and you quite forget what became of it! My dear Harry, how like a man!

SPREAD. I was deceived, my dear Jane — deceived! I had no idea that you attached so much value to my flower.

JENNY. We were both deceived, Henry Spreadbrow.

SPREAD. Then is it possible that in treating me as you did, Jane, you were acting a part?

JENNY. We were both acting parts — but the play is over, and there's an end of it. [*With assumed cheerfulness.*] Let us talk of something else.

SPREAD. No, no, Jane, the play is *not* over — we will talk of nothing else — the play is not nearly over. My dear Jane — [*rising, and taking her hand*] my very dear Jane — believe me, for I speak from my hardened old heart, so far from the play being over, the serious interest is only just beginning.

[*He kisses her hand — they walk towards the house.*]

SLOW CURTAIN

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The Romancers (Edmond Rostand)
Prunella (Granville Barker and Laurence Housman)

QUESTIONS ON "SWEETHEARTS"

1. Is the dialogue natural or stilted?
2. What is the source of the humor?
3. How does Gilbert avoid the merely sentimental?
4. Is there any satire in the play?

OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on October 15, 1856, and died in Paris on November 30, 1900. Four other of the greatest British writers of comedies were born in Ireland: Farquhar, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Shaw. Wilde was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and at Oxford. After leaving college, he went to London, where he became the most conspicuous member of a group of decadent writers who affected to scorn the world they lived in and to turn completely to art for refuge. These æsthetes, as they termed themselves, declared frankly that they considered art greater than life, ridiculed the morality of the day, and ignored, for the most part, social and moral problems of current interest. Naturally much affectation and posing resulted, affording Gilbert and Sullivan in *Patience* (a delicious burlesque of the æsthetic movement) and other satirists a rich field in which to practice their satire.

Wilde wrote plays during the years between 1892 and 1895 only, but his four comedies have won him an enduring place in dramatic literature. *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), the best known of the four, has maintained its stage popularity to this day. Although *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) belongs to a lower genre of comedy — farce — it is considered by many to be his best play and the best farce in the English language. *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) complete the list of his comedies. He also wrote *Salomé* in French for his friend and admirer Sarah Bernhardt, the great French actress, and one other tragedy, *The Duchess of Padua*, which is less satisfactory, although in part beautifully written.

Wilde's plays have a characteristic cleverness of wit and repartee which has been much imitated but never equaled. This wit, highly artificial and often inartistically superimposed upon character and scene, is the distinctive excellence of his comedies. Every page sparkles with anti-climax, epigram, paradox, facetious antithesis. No such collections of epigrammatists as he puts into one drawing-room are to be found in this weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable world; to read much of Wilde is just a little dizzying. An examination of Wilde's humor reveals often a negative basis: frequently it is merely an audacious denial of some accepted point of view. "The one advantage of playing with fire is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up." "He is as domestic as if he were a bachelor." "A man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person." Wilde is a master of the anti-climax: "I was in hopes he would marry Lady Kelso. But I believe he said her family was too large. Or was it her feet?"

Although Wilde brought into favor again the *jeu d'esprit* of Congreve and Sheridan, he was less successful than his comic predecessors in the delineation of character and the invention of plot. The story itself of a Wilde comedy (other than *The Importance of Being Earnest*) is the most obvious melodrama. The plays are termed comedies merely because of the witticisms of the characters and not because of any essentially comic situations in which the characters find themselves. One seldom feels that the playwright is really interested in the story he is telling; he is keenly interested, however, in directing his characters into the most astounding conversational bypaths in order to express a flashing epigram. Such fundamentally false portraiture is to be expected of one who announced consistently, and who tried to make himself believe, that the first duty of life is to be as artificial as possible. Were it not for his inimitable wit, his comedies would never have survived with their frequent theatrical claptrap, melodrama, and absurd sentimentality.

A Woman of No Importance is both witty and excessively sentimental; it is also a genuine comedy of manners in its *exposé* of certain features of the society in which Wilde lived, and there is a slight undercurrent of serious criticism of life which his other plays fail to attain.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE
(1893)

BY

OSCAR WILDE

CHARACTERS

Lord Illingworth
Sir John Pontefract
Lord Alfred Rufford
Mr. Kelvil, M. P.
The Ven. Archdeacon Daubeny, D.D.
Gerald Arbuthnot
Farquhar, *butler*
Francis, *footman*
Lady Hunstanton
Lady Caroline Pontefract
Lady Stutfield
Mrs. Allonby
Miss Hester Worsley
Alice, *maid*
Mrs. Arbuthnot

Act I: The terrace at Hunstanton Chase.

Act II: The drawing-room at Hunstanton Chase.

Act III: The hall at Hunstanton Chase.

Act IV: Sitting-room in Mrs. Arbuthnot's house at Wrockley.

Time: *The Present.*

Place: *The Shires.*

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours.

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

ACT I

SCENE.—*Lawn in front of the terrace at Hunstanton.* (SIR JOHN *and* LADY CAROLINE PONTEFRACT, MISS WORSLEY, *on chairs under large yew tree.*)

LADY CAROLINE. I believe this is the first English country house you have stayed at, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Yes, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You have no country houses, I am told, in America?

HESTER. We have not many.

LADY CAROLINE. Have you any country? What we should call country?

HESTER [*smiling*]. We have the largest country in the world, Lady Caroline. They used to tell us at school that some of our states are as big as France and England put together.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah! you must find it very draughty, I should fancy. [*To* SIR JOHN.] John, you should have your muffler. What is the use of my always knitting mufflers for you if you won't wear them?

SIR JOHN. I am quite warm, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. Well, you couldn't come to a more charming place than this, Miss Worsley, though the house is excessively damp, quite unpardonably damp, and dear Lady Hunstanton is sometimes a little lax about the people she asks down here. [*To* SIR JOHN.] Jane mixes too much. Lord Illingworth, of course, is a man of high distinction. It is a privilege to meet him. And that member of Parliament, Mr. Kettle—

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY CAROLINE. He must be quite respectable. One has never heard his name before in the whole course of one's life, which speaks volumes for a man, nowadays. But Mrs. Allonby is hardly a very suitable person.

HESTER. I dislike Mrs. Allonby. I dislike her more than I can say.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not sure, Miss Worsley, that foreigners like yourself should cultivate likes or dislikes about the people they are invited to meet. Mrs. Allonby is very well born. She is a niece of Lord Brancaster's. It is said, of course, that she ran away twice before she was married. But you know how unfair people often are. I myself don't believe she ran away more than once.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot is very charming.

LADY CAROLINE. Ah, yes! the young man who has a post in a bank. Lady Hunstanton is most kind in asking him here, and Lord Illingworth seems to have taken quite a fancy to him. I am not sure, however, that Jane is right in taking him out of his position. In my young days, Miss Worsley, one never met any one in society who worked for their living. It was not considered the thing.

HESTER. In America those are the people we respect most.

LADY CAROLINE. I have no doubt of it.

HESTER. Mr. Arbuthnot has a beautiful nature! He is so simple, so sincere. He has one of the most beautiful natures I have ever come across. It is a privilege to meet him.

LADY CAROLINE. It is not customary in England, Miss Worsley, for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. English women conceal their feelings till after they are married. They show them then.

HESTER. Do you, in England, allow

no friendship to exist between a young man and a young girl?

[*Enter* LADY HUNSTANTON, *followed by* FOOTMAN *with shawls and a cushion.*]

LADY CAROLINE. We think it very inadvisable. Jane, I was just saying what a pleasant party you have asked us to meet. You have a wonderful power of selection. It is quite a gift.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Dear Caroline, how kind of you! I think we all do fit in very nicely together. And I hope our charming American visitor will carry back pleasant recollections of our English country life. [*To* FOOTMAN.] The cushion there, Francis. And my shawl. The Shetland. Get the Shetland.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN *for shawl.*]

[*Enter* GERALD ARBUTHNOT.]

GERALD. Lady Hunstanton, I have such good news to tell you. Lord Illingworth has just offered to make me his secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. His secretary? That is good news indeed, Gerald. It means a very brilliant future in store for you. Your dear mother will be delighted. I really must try and induce her to come up here to-night. Do you think she would, Gerald? I know how difficult it is to get her to go anywhere.

GERALD. Oh! I am sure she would, Lady Hunstanton, if she knew Lord Illingworth had made me such an offer.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN *with shawl.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I will write and tell her about it, and ask her to come up and meet him. [*To* FOOTMAN.] Just wait, Francis. [*Writes letter.*]

LADY CAROLINE. That is a very wonderful opening for so young a man as you are, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. It is indeed, Lady Caroline. I trust I shall be able to show myself worthy of it.

LADY CAROLINE. I trust so.

GERALD [*to* HESTER]. *You* have not congratulated me yet, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. Are you very pleased about it?

GERALD. Of course I am. It means everything to me — things that were out of the reach of hope before may be within hope's reach now.

HESTER. Nothing should be out of the reach of hope. Life is a hope.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I fancy, Caroline, that Diplomacy is what Lord Illingworth is aiming at. I heard that he was offered Vienna. But that may not be true.

LADY CAROLINE. I don't think that England should be represented abroad by an unmarried man, Jane. It might lead to complications.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are too nervous, Caroline. Believe me, you are too nervous. Besides, Lord Illingworth may marry any day. I was in hopes he would have married Lady Kelso. But I believe he said her family was too large. Or was it her feet? I forget which. I regret it very much. She was made to be an ambassador's wife.

LADY CAROLINE. She certainly has a wonderful faculty of remembering people's names, and forgetting their faces.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, that is very natural, Caroline, is it not? [*To* FOOTMAN.] Tell Henry to wait for an answer. I have written a line to your dear mother, Gerald, to tell her your good news, and to say she really must come to dinner. [*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

GERALD. That is awfully kind of you, Lady Hunstanton. [*To* HESTER.] Will you come for a stroll, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. With pleasure.

[*Exit with* GERALD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am very much gratified at Gerald Arbuthnot's good fortune. He is quite a *protégé* of mine. And I am particularly pleased that Lord Illingworth should have made the offer of his own accord without my suggesting anything. Nobody likes to be asked favors. I remember poor Charlotte Pagden making herself quite unpopular one season, because she had a French governess she wanted to recommend to every one.

LADY CAROLINE. I saw the governess, Jane. Lady Pagden sent her to me. It was before Eleanor came out. She was

far too good-looking to be in any respectable household. I don't wonder Lady Pagden was so anxious to get rid of her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that explains it.

LADY CAROLINE. John, the grass is too damp for you. You had better go and put on your overshoes at once.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE. You must allow me to be the best judge of that, John. Pray do as I tell you.

[SIR JOHN *gets up and goes off.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. You spoil him, Caroline, you do indeed!

[*Enter* MRS. ALLONBY *and* LADY STUTFIELD.]

[*To* MRS. ALLONBY]. Well, dear, I hope you like the park. It is said to be well timbered.

MRS. ALLONBY. The trees are wonderful, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY STUTFIELD. Quite, quite wonderful.

MRS. ALLONBY. But somehow, I feel sure that if I lived in the country for six months, I should become so unsophisticated that no one would take the slightest notice of me.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I assure you, dear, that the country has not that effect at all. Why, it was from Melthorpe, which is only two miles from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale. I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Belton died three days afterwards of joy, or gout. I forget which. We had a large party staying here at the time, so we were all very much interested in the whole affair.

MRS. ALLONBY. I think to elope is cowardly. It's running away from danger. And danger has become so rare in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can make out, the young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire.

MRS. ALLONBY. The one advantage of playing with fire, Lady Caroline, is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; I see that. It is very, very helpful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't know how the world would get on with such a theory as that, dear Mrs. Allonby.

LADY STUTFIELD. Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; that is quite, quite true. I had not thought of that.

[*Enter* SIR JOHN *and* MR. KELVIL.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, Mr. Kelvil, have you got through your work?

KELVIL. I have finished my writing for the day, Lady Hunstanton. It has been an arduous task. The demands on the time of a public man are very heavy nowadays, very heavy indeed. And I don't think they meet with adequate recognition.

LADY CAROLINE. John, have you got your overshoes on?

SIR JOHN. Yes, my love.

LADY CAROLINE. I think you had better come over here, John. It is more sheltered.

SIR JOHN. I am quite comfortable, Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I think not, John. You had better sit beside me.

[SIR JOHN *rises and goes across.*]

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been writing about this morning, Mr. Kelvil?

KELVIL. On the usual subject, Lady Stutfield. On Purity.

LADY STUTFIELD. That must be such a very, very interesting thing to write about.

KELVIL. It is the one subject of really national importance, nowadays, Lady Stutfield. I purpose addressing my constituents on the question before Parliament meets. I find that the poorer classes of this country display a marked desire for a higher ethical standard.

LADY STUTFIELD. How quite, quite nice of them.

LADY CAROLINE. Are you in favor of women taking part in politics, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

KELVIL. The growing influence of women is the one reassuring thing in our political life, Lady Caroline. Women are always on the side of morality, public and private.

LADY STUTFIELD. It is so very, very gratifying to hear you say that.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes! the moral qualities in women — that is the important thing. I am afraid, Caroline, that dear Lord Illingworth doesn't value the moral qualities in women as much as he should.

[*Enter* LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY STUTFIELD. The world says that Lord Illingworth is very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. But what world says that, Lady Stutfield? It must be the next world. This world and I are on excellent terms.

[*Sits down beside* MRS. ALLONBY.]

LADY STUTFIELD. Every one *I* know says you are very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is perfectly monstrous the way people go about nowadays, saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Dear Lord Illingworth is quite hopeless, Lady Stutfield. I have given up trying to reform him. It would take a Public Company with a Board of Directors and a paid Secretary to do that. But you have the secretary already, Lord Illingworth, haven't you? Gerald Arbuthnot has told us of his good fortune; it is really most kind of you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, don't say that, Lady Hunstanton. Kind is a dreadful word. I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him, and he'll be of considerable use to me in something I am foolish enough to think of doing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. He is an admirable young man. And his mother is one of my dearest friends. He has just gone for a walk with our pretty American. She is very pretty, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. Far too pretty. These American girls carry off all the good matches. Why can't they stay in their own country? They are always telling us it is the Paradise of women.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is, Lady Caroline. That is why, like Eve, they are so extremely anxious to get out of it.

LADY CAROLINE. Who are Miss Worsley's parents?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American women are wonderfully clever in concealing their parents.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Lord Illingworth, what do you mean? Miss Worsley, Caroline, is an orphan. Her father was a very wealthy millionaire, or philanthropist, or both, I believe, who entertained my son quite hospitably, when he visited Boston. I don't know how he made his money, originally.

KELVIL. I fancy in American dry goods.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are American dry goods?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. American novels.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How very singular! . . . Well, from whatever source her large fortune came, I have a great esteem for Miss Worsley. She dresses exceedingly well. All Americans do dress well. They get their clothes in Paris.

MRS. ALLONBY. They say, Lady Hunstanton, that when good Americans die they go to Paris.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Indeed? And when bad Americans die, where do they go to?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, they go to America.

KELVIL. I am afraid you don't appreciate America, Lord Illingworth. It is a very remarkable country, especially considering its youth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years. To hear them talk one would imagine they were in their first child-

hood. As far as civilization goes they are in their second.

KELVIL. There is undoubtedly a great deal of corruption in American politics. I suppose you allude to that?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I wonder.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Politics are in a very sad way everywhere, I am told. They certainly are in England. Dear Mr. Cardew is ruining the country. I wonder Mrs. Cardew allows him. I am sure, Lord Illingworth, you don't think that uneducated people should be allowed to have votes?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I think they are the only people who should.

KELVIL. Do you take no side then in modern politics, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never take sides in anything, Mr. Kelvil. Taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and earnestness follows shortly afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore. However, the House of Commons really does very little harm. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament, — that is something.

KELVIL. You cannot deny that the House of Commons has always shown great sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is its special vice. That is the special vice of the age. One should sympathize with the joy, the beauty, the color of life. The less said about life's sores the better, Mr. Kelvil.

KELVIL. Still our East End is a very important problem.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, a great deal may be done by means of cheap entertainments, as you say, Lord Illingworth. Dear Dr. Daubeny, our rector here, provides, with the assistance of his curates, really admirable recreations for the poor during the winter. And much good may be done by means of a magic lantern, or a missionary, or some popular amusement of that kind.

LADY CAROLINE. I am not at all in favor of amusements for the poor, Jane. Blankets and coals are sufficient. There is too much love of pleasure amongst the upper classes as it is. Health is what we want in modern life. The tone is not healthy, not healthy at all.

KELVIL. You are quite right, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. I believe I am usually right.

MRS. ALLONBY. Horrid word "health."

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Silliest word in our language, and one knows so well the popular idea of health. The English country gentleman galloping after a fox — the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable.

KELVIL. May I ask, Lord Illingworth, if you regard the House of Lords as a better institution than the House of Commons?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A much better institution, of course. We in the House of Lords are never in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilized body.

KELVIL. Are you serious in putting forward such a view?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite serious, Mr. Kelvil. [*To* MRS. ALLONBY.] Vulgar habit that is people have nowadays of asking one, after one has given them an idea, whether one is serious or not. Nothing is serious except passion. The intellect is not a serious thing, and never has been. It is an instrument on which one plays, that is all. The only serious form of intellect I know is the British intellect. And on the British intellect the illiterates play the drum.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What are you saying, Lord Illingworth, about the drum?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was merely talking to Mrs. Allonby about the leading articles in the London newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you believe all that is written in the newspapers?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do. Nowadays it is only the unreadable that occurs.

[*Rises with* MRS. ALLONBY.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Are you going, Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. Just as far as the conservatory. Lord Illingworth told me

this morning that there was an orchid there as beautiful as the seven deadly sins.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I will certainly speak to the gardener.

[*Exit* MRS. ALLONBY *and* LORD ILLINGWORTH.]

LADY CAROLINE. Remarkable type, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She lets her clever tongue run away with her sometimes.

LADY CAROLINE. Is that the only thing, Jane, Mrs. Allonby allows to run away with her?

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope so, Caroline, I am sure.

[*Enter* LORD ALFRED.]

Dear Lord Alfred, do join us.

[LORD ALFRED *sits down beside* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY CAROLINE. You believe good of every one, Jane. It is a great fault.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really, really think, Lady Caroline, that one should believe evil of every one?

LADY CAROLINE. I think it is much safer to do so, Lady Stutfield. Until, of course, people are found out to be good. But that requires a great deal of investigation, nowadays.

LADY STUTFIELD. But there is so much unkind scandal in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. Lord Illingworth remarked to me last night at dinner that the basis of every scandal is an absolutely immoral certainty.

KELVIL. Lord Illingworth is, of course, a very brilliant man, but he seems to me to be lacking in that fine faith in the nobility and purity of life which is so important in this century.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, quite, quite important, is it not?

KELVIL. He gives me the impression of a man who does not appreciate the beauty of our English home-life. I should say that he was tainted with foreign ideas on the subject.

LADY STUTFIELD. There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?

KELVIL. It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbors.

LADY STUTFIELD. That would be so, so sad, would it not?

KELVIL. I am afraid, too, that Lord Illingworth regards woman simply as a toy. Now, I have never regarded woman as a toy. Woman is the intellectual helpmate of man in public as in private life. Without her we should forget the true ideals.

[*Sits down beside* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY STUTFIELD. I am so very, very glad to hear you say that.

LADY CAROLINE. You are a married man, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, dear. Kelvil.

KELVIL. I am married, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. Family?

KELVIL. Yes.

LADY CAROLINE. How many?

KELVIL. Eight.

[LADY STUTFIELD *turns her attention to* LORD ALFRED.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mrs. Kettle and the children are, I suppose, at the seaside.

[SIR JOHN *shrugs his shoulders.*]

KELVIL. My wife is at the seaside with the children, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE. You will join them later on, no doubt?

KELVIL. If my public engagements permit me.

LADY CAROLINE. Your public life must be a great source of gratification to Mrs. Kettle.

SIR JOHN. Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY STUTFIELD [*to* LORD ALFRED]. How very, very charming those gold-tipped cigarettes of yours are, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED. They are awfully expensive. I can only afford them when I'm in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. It must be terribly, terribly distressing to be in debt.

LORD ALFRED. One must have some occupation nowadays. If I hadn't my debts I shouldn't have anything to think about. All the chaps I know are in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD. But don't the people

to whom you owe the money give you a great, great deal of annoyance?

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.]

LORD ALFRED. Oh no, they write; I don't.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very strange.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, here is a letter, Caroline, from dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. She won't dine. I am so sorry. But she will come in the evening. I am very pleased indeed. She is one of the sweetest of women. Writes a beautiful hand, too, so large, so firm.

[*Hands letter to* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE [*looking at it*]. A little lacking in femininity, Jane. Femininity is the quality I admire most in women.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*taking back letter and leaving it on table*]. Oh! she is very feminine, Caroline, and so good, too. You should hear what the Archdeacon says of her. He regards her as his right hand in the parish. [FOOTMAN *speaks to her.*] In the Yellow Drawing-room. Shall we all go in? Lady Stutfield, shall we go in to tea?

LADY STUTFIELD. With pleasure, Lady Hunstanton.

[*They rise and proceed to go off.* SIR JOHN *offers to carry* LADY STUTFIELD'S *cloak.*]

LADY CAROLINE. John! If you would allow your nephew to look after Lady Stutfield's cloak, you might help me with my workbasket.

[*Enter* LORD ILLINGWORTH *and* MRS. ALLONBY.]

SIR JOHN. Certainly, my love.

[*Exeunt.*]

MRS. ALLONBY. Curious thing, plain women are always jealous of their husbands, beautiful women never are!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Beautiful women never have time. They are always so occupied in being jealous of other people's husbands.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should have thought Lady Caroline would have grown tired of conjugal anxiety by this time! Sir John is her fourth!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So much marriage is certainly not becoming. Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building.

MRS. ALLONBY. Twenty years of romance! Is there such a thing?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Not in our day. Women have become too brilliant. Nothing spoils a romance so much as a sense of humor in the woman.

MRS. ALLONBY. Or the want of it in the man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are quite right. In a Temple every one should be serious, except the thing that is worshipped.

MRS. ALLONBY. And that should be man?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Women kneel so gracefully; men don't.

MRS. ALLONBY. You are thinking of Lady Stutfield!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I assure you I have not thought of Lady Stutfield for the last quarter of an hour.

MRS. ALLONBY. Is she such a mystery?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. She is more than a mystery — she is a mood.

MRS. ALLONBY. Moods don't last.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is their chief charm.

[*Enter* HESTER *and* GERALD.]

GERALD. Lord Illingworth, every one has been congratulating me, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline, and . . . every one. I hope I shall make a good secretary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You will be the pattern secretary, Gerald.

[*Talks to him.*]

MRS. ALLONBY. You enjoy country life, Miss Worsley?

HESTER. Very much indeed.

MRS. ALLONBY. Don't find yourself longing for a London dinner party?

HESTER. I dislike London dinner parties.

MRS. ALLONBY. I adore them. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

HESTER. I think the stupid people talk a great deal.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, I never listen!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy, if I didn't like you I wouldn't have made you the offer. It is because I like you so much that I want to have you with me. [*Exit* HESTER *with* GERALD.] Charming fellow, Gerald Arbuthnot!

MRS. ALLONBY. He is very nice; very nice indeed. But I can't stand the American young lady.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why?

MRS. ALLONBY. She told me yesterday, and in quite a loud voice, too, that she was only eighteen. It was most annoying.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that would tell one anything.

MRS. ALLONBY. She is a Puritan besides —

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Ah, that is inexcusable. I don't mind plain women being Puritans. It is the only excuse they have for being plain. But she is decidedly pretty. I admire her immensely.

[*Looks stedfastly at* MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a thoroughly bad man you must be!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you call a bad man?

MRS. ALLONBY. The sort of man who admires innocence.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And a bad woman?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh! the sort of woman a man never gets tired of.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You are severe — on yourself.

MRS. ALLONBY. Define us as a sex.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Sphinxes without secrets.

MRS. ALLONBY. Does that include the Puritan women?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do you know, I don't believe in the existence of Puritan women? I don't think there is a woman in the world who would not be a little flattered if one made love to her. It is that which makes women so irresistibly adorable.

MRS. ALLONBY. You think there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Very few.

MRS. ALLONBY. Miss Worsley would not let you kiss her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you sure?

MRS. ALLONBY. Quite.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you think she'd do if I kissed her?

MRS. ALLONBY. Either marry you, or strike you across the face with her glove. What would you do if she struck you across the face with her glove?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I'd fall in love with her probably.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then it is lucky you are not going to kiss her!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Is that a challenge?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is an arrow shot into the air.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Don't you know that I always succeed in whatever I try?

MRS. ALLONBY. I am sorry to hear it. We women adore failures. They lean on us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You worship successes. You cling to them.

MRS. ALLONBY. We are the laurels to hide their baldness.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And they need you always, except at the moment of triumph.

MRS. ALLONBY. They are uninteresting then.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How tantalizing you are! [*A pause.*]

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, there is one thing I shall always like you for.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only one thing? And I have so many bad qualities.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, don't be too conceited about them. You may lose them as you grow old.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I never intend to grow old. The soul is born old but grows young. That is the comedy of life.

MRS. ALLONBY. And the body is born young and grows old. That is life's tragedy.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Its comedy also, sometimes. But what is the mysterious reason why you will always like me?

MRS. ALLONBY. It is that you have never made love to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have never done anything else.

MRS. ALLONBY. Really? I have not noticed it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How fortunate! It might have been a tragedy for both of us.

MRS. ALLONBY. We should each have survived.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One can survive everything nowadays, except death, and live down anything except a good reputation.

MRS. ALLONBY. Have you tried a good reputation?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of the many annoyances to which I have never been subjected.

MRS. ALLONBY. It may come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Why do you threaten me?

MRS. ALLONBY. I will tell you when you have kissed the Puritan.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.]

FRANCIS. Tea is served in the Yellow Drawing-room, my lord.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Tell her ladyship we are coming in.

FRANCIS. Yes, my lord. [*Exit.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Shall we go in to tea?

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you like such simple pleasures?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex. But, if you wish, let us stay here. Yes, let us stay here. The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden.

MRS. ALLONBY. It ends with Revelations.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You fence divinely. But the button has come off your foil.

MRS. ALLONBY. I have still the mask.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It makes your eyes lovelier.

MRS. ALLONBY. Thank you. Come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH [*sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT'S *letter on table, and takes it up and looks at envelope*]. What a curious handwriting! It reminds me of the handwriting of a woman I used to know years ago.

MRS. ALLONBY. Who?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! no one. No one in particular. A woman of no importance.

[*Throws letter down, and passes up the steps of the terrace with* MRS. ALLONBY. *They smile at each other.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.— *Drawing-room at Hunstanton, after dinner, lamps lit. Door* L.C. *Door* R.C.

[*Ladies seated on sofas.*]

MRS. ALLONBY. What a comfort it is to have got rid of the men for a little!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men persecute us dreadfully, don't they?

MRS. ALLONBY. Persecute us? I wish they did.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. The annoying thing is that the wretches can be perfectly happy without us. That is why I think it is every woman's duty never to leave them alone for a single moment, except during this short breathing space after dinner; without which I believe we poor women would be absolutely worn to shadows.

[*Enter* SERVANTS *with coffee.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Worn to shadows, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. Yes, Lady Hunstanton. It is such a strain keeping men up to the mark. They are always trying to escape from us.

LADY STUTFIELD. It seems to me that it is we who are always trying to escape from them. Men are so very, very heartless. They know their power and use it.

LADY CAROLINE [*takes coffee from* SERVANT]. What stuff and nonsense all this about men is! The thing to do is to keep men in their proper place.

MRS. ALLONBY. But what is their proper place, Lady Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. Looking after their wives, Mrs. Allonby.

MRS. ALLONBY [*takes coffee from* SERVANT]. Really? And if they're not married?

LADY CAROLINE. If they are not married, they should be looking after a wife. It's perfectly scandalous the amount of bachelors who are going about society. There should be a law passed to compel them all to marry within twelve months.

LADY STUTFIELD [*refuses coffee*]. But if they're in love with some one who, perhaps, is tied to another?

LADY CAROLINE. In that case, Lady Stutfield, they should be married off in a week to some plain, respectable girl, in order to teach them not to meddle with other people's property.

MRS. ALLONBY. I don't think that we should ever be spoken of as other people's property. All men are married women's property. That is the only true definition of what married women's property really is. But we don't belong to any one.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I am so very, very glad to hear you say so.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But do you really think, dear Caroline, that legislation would improve matters in any way? I am told that, nowadays, all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. I certainly never know one from the other.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh, I think one can always know at once whether a man has home claims upon his life or not. I have noticed a very, very sad expression in the eyes of so many married men.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, all that I have noticed is that they are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and abominably conceited when they are not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, I suppose the type of husband has completely changed since my young days, but I'm bound to state that poor dear Hunstanton was the most delightful of creatures, and as good as gold.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, my husband is a sort of promissory note; I am tired of meeting him.

LADY CAROLINE. But you renew him from time to time, don't you?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh no, Lady Caroline. I have only had one husband as yet. I suppose you look upon me as quite an amateur.

LADY CAROLINE. With your views on life I wonder you married at all.

MRS. ALLONBY. So do I.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, I believe you are really very happy in your married life, but that you like to hide your happiness from others.

MRS. ALLONBY. I assure you I was horribly deceived in Ernest.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, I hope not, dear. I knew his mother quite well. She was a Stratton, Caroline, one of Lord Crowland's daughters.

LADY CAROLINE. Victoria Stratton? I remember her perfectly. A silly, fair-haired woman with no chin.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, Ernest has a chin. He has a very strong chin, a square chin. Ernest's chin is far too square.

LADY STUTFIELD. But do you really think a man's chin can be too square? I think a man should look very, very strong, and that his chin should be quite, quite square.

MRS. ALLONBY. Then you should certainly know Ernest, Lady Stutfield. It is only fair to tell you beforehand he has got no conversation at all.

LADY STUTFIELD. I adore silent men.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Ernest isn't silent. He talks the whole time. But he has got no conversation. What he talks about I don't know. I haven't listened to him for years.

LADY STUTFIELD. Have you never forgiven him then? How sad that seems! But all life is very, very sad, is it not?

MRS. ALLONBY. Life, Lady Stutfield, is simply a *mauvais quart d'heure* made up of exquisite moments.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, there are moments, certainly. But was it something very, very wrong that Mr. Allonby did? Did he become angry with you, and say anything that was unkind or true?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh dear, no. Ernest is invariably calm. That is one of the reasons he always gets on my nerves. Nothing is so aggravating as calmness. There is something positively brutal about the good temper of most modern

men. I wonder we women stand it as well as we do.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; men's good temper shows they are not so sensitive as we are, not so finely strung. It makes a great barrier often between husband and wife, does it not? But I would so much like to know what was the wrong thing Mr. Allonby did.

MRS. ALLONBY. Well, I will tell you, if you solemnly promise to tell everybody else.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. I will make a point of repeating it.

MRS. ALLONBY. When Ernest and I were engaged he swore to me positively on his knees that he never had loved any one before in the whole course of his life. I was very young at the time, so I didn't believe him, I needn't tell you. Unfortunately, however, I made no enquiries of any kind till after I had been actually married four or five months. I found out then that what he had told me was perfectly true. And that sort of thing makes a man so absolutely uninteresting.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Men always want to be a woman's first love. That is their clumsy vanity. We women have a more subtle instinct about things. What we like is to be a man's last romance.

LADY STUTFIELD. I see what you mean. It's very, very beautiful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear child, you don't mean to tell me that you won't forgive your husband because he never loved any one else? Did you ever hear such a thing, Caroline? I am quite surprised.

LADY CAROLINE. Oh, women have become so highly educated, Jane, that nothing should surprise us nowadays, except happy marriages. They apparently are getting remarkably rare.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, they're quite out of date.

LADY STUTFIELD. Except amongst the middle classes, I have been told.

MRS. ALLONBY. How like the middle classes!

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes — is it not? — very, very like them.

LADY CAROLINE. If what you tell us about the middle classes is true, Lady Stutfield, it redounds greatly to their credit. It is much to be regretted that in our rank of life the wife should be so persistently frivolous, under the impression apparently that it is the proper thing to be. It is to that I attribute the unhappiness of so many marriages we all know of in society.

MRS. ALLONBY. Do you know, Lady Caroline, I don't think the frivolity of the wife has ever anything to do with it. More marriages are ruined nowadays by the common sense of the husband than by anything else. How can a woman be expected to be happy with a man who insists on treating her as if she were a perfectly rational being?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY. Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions and millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Women is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of common sense. We saw its dangers from the first.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, the common sense of husbands is certainly most, most trying. Do tell me your conception of the Ideal Husband. I think it would be so very, very helpful.

MRS. ALLONBY. The Ideal Husband? There couldn't be such a thing. The institution is wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. The Ideal Man, then, in his relations to *us*.

LADY CAROLINE. He would probably be extremely realistic.

MRS. ALLONBY. The Ideal Man? Oh, the Ideal Man should talk to us as if we were goddesses, and treat us as if we were children. He should refuse all our serious requests, and gratify every one of our whims. He should encourage us to have caprices, and forbid us to have missions. He should always say much more than he means, and always mean much more than he says.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But how could he do both, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY. He should never run

down other pretty women. That would show he had no taste, or make one suspect that he had too much. No; he should be nice about them all, but say that somehow they don't attract him.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes, that is always very, very pleasant to hear about other women.

MRS. ALLONBY. If we ask him a question about anything, he should give us an answer all about ourselves. He should invariably praise us for whatever qualities he knows we haven't got. But he should be pitiless, quite pitiless, in reproaching us for the virtues that we have never dreamed of possessing. He should never believe that we know the use of useful things. That would be unforgivable. But he should shower on us everything we don't want.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can see, he is to do nothing but pay bills and compliments.

MRS. ALLONBY. He should persistently compromise us in public, and treat us with absolute respect when we are alone. And yet he should be always ready to have a perfectly terrible scene, whenever we want one, and to become miserable, absolutely miserable, at a moment's notice, and to overwhelm us with just reproaches in less than twenty minutes, and to be positively violent at the end of half an hour, and to leave us for ever at a quarter to eight, when we have to go and dress for dinner. And when, after that, one has seen him for really the last time, and he has refused to take back the little things he has given one, and promised never to communicate with one again, or to write one any foolish letters, he should be perfectly broken-hearted, and telegraph to one all day long, and send one little notes every half-hour by a private hansom, and dine quite alone at the club, so that every one should know how unhappy he was. And after a whole dreadful week, during which one has gone about everywhere with one's husband, just to show how absolutely lonely one was, he may be given a third last parting, in the evening, and then, if his conduct has been quite irreproachable, and one has behaved really badly to him, he should be allowed to admit that he has been entirely in the wrong, and when he has admitted that, it becomes a woman's duty to forgive, and one can do it all over again from the beginning, with variations.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How clever you are, my dear! You never mean a single word you say.

LADY STUTFIELD. Thank you, thank you. It has been quite, quite entrancing. I must try and remember it all. There are such a number of details that are so very, very important.

LADY CAROLINE. But you have not told us yet what the reward of the Ideal Man is to be.

MRS. ALLONBY. His reward? Oh, infinite expectation. That is quite enough for him.

LADY STUTFIELD. But men are so terribly, terribly exacting, are they not?

MRS. ALLONBY. That makes no matter. One should never surrender.

LADY STUTFIELD. Not even to the Ideal Man?

MRS. ALLONBY. Certainly not to him. Unless, of course, one wants to grow tired of him.

LADY STUTFIELD. Oh! . . . yes. I see that. It is very, very helpful. Do you think, Mrs. Allonby, I shall ever meet the Ideal Man? Or are there more than one?

MRS. ALLONBY. There are just four in London, Lady Stutfield.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, my dear!

MRS. ALLONBY [*going over to her*]. What has happened? Do tell me.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*in a low voice*]. I had completely forgotten that the American young lady has been in the room all the time. I am afraid some of this clever talk may have shocked her a little.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that will do her so much good!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Let us hope she didn't understand much. I think I had better go over and talk to her. [*Rises and goes across to* HESTER WORSLEY.] Well, dear Miss Worsley. [*Sitting down*

beside her.] How quiet you have been in your nice little corner all this time! I suppose you have been reading a book? There are so many books here in the library.

HESTER. No, I have been listening to the conversation.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You mustn't believe everything that was said, you know, dear.

HESTER. I didn't believe any of it.

LADY HUNSTANTON. That is quite right, dear.

HESTER [*continuing*]. I couldn't believe that any women could really hold such views of life as I have heard tonight from some of your guests.

[*An awkward pause.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hear you have such pleasant society in America. Quite like our own in places, my son wrote to me.

HESTER. There are cliques in America as elsewhere, Lady Hunstanton. But true American society consists simply of all the good women and good men we have in our country.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What a sensible system, and I dare say quite pleasant, too. I am afraid in England we have too many artificial social barriers. We don't see as much as we should of the middle and lower classes.

HESTER. In America we have no lower classes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a very strange arrangement!

MRS. ALLONBY. What is that dreadful girl talking about?

LADY STUTFIELD. She is painfully natural, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE. There are a great many things you haven't got in America, I am told, Miss Worsley. They say you have no ruins, and no curiosities.

MRS. ALLONBY [*to* LADY STUTFIELD]. What nonsense! They have their mothers and their manners.

HESTER. The English aristocracy supply us with our curiosities, Lady Caroline. They are sent over to us every summer, regularly, in the steamers, and propose to us the day after they land. As for ruins, we are trying to build up something that will last longer than brick or stone.

[*Gets up to take her fan from table.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. What is that, dear? Ah, yes, an iron Exhibition, is it not, at that place that has the curious name?

HESTER [*standing by table*]. We are trying to build up life, Lady Hunstanton, on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here. This sounds strange to you all, no doubt. How could it sound other than strange? You rich people in England, you don't know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the simple and the pure. Living, as you all do, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season. With all your pomp and wealth and art you don't know how to live — you don't even know that. You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life's secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. It has blinded its eyes, and stopped its ears. It lies like a leper in purple. It sits like a dead thing smeared with gold. It is all wrong, all wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD. I don't think one should know of these things. It is not very, very nice, is it?

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Miss Worsley, I thought you liked English society so much. You were such a success in it. And you were so much admired by the best people. I quite forget what Lord Henry Weston said of you — but it was most complimentary, and you know what an authority he is on beauty.

HESTER. Lord Henry Weston! I remember him, Lady Hunstanton. A man with a hideous smile and a hideous past. He is asked everywhere. No dinner-party is complete without him. What of those whose ruin is due to him? They are outcasts. They are nameless. If you met them in the street you would turn

your head away. I don't complain of their punishment. Let all women who have sinned be punished.

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *enters from terrace behind in a cloak with a lace veil over her head. She hears the last words and starts.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady!

HESTER. It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.

LADY CAROLINE. Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Mrs. Arbuthnot! I am so pleased you have come up. But I didn't hear you announced.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Oh, I came straight in from the terrace, Lady Hunstanton, just as I was. You didn't tell me you had a party.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Not a party. Only a few guests who are staying in the house, and whom you must know. Allow me. [*Tries to help her. Rings bell.*] Caroline, this is Mrs. Arbuthnot, one of my sweetest friends. Lady Caroline Pontefract, Lady Stutfield, Mrs. Allonby, and my young American friend, Miss Worsley, who has just been telling us all how wicked we are.

HESTER. I am afraid you think I spoke too strongly, Lady Hunstanton. But there are some things in England—

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady, there was a great deal of truth, I dare say, in what you said, and you looked very pretty while you said it, which is much more important, Lord Illingworth would tell us. The only point where I thought you were a little hard was about Lady Caroline's brother, about poor Lord Henry. He is really such good company.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.]

Take Mrs. Arbuthnot's things.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN *with wraps.*]

HESTER. Lady Caroline, I had no idea it was your brother. I am sorry for the pain I must have caused you—I—

LADY CAROLINE. My dear Miss Worsley, the only part of your little speech, if I may so term it, with which I thoroughly agreed, was the part about my brother. Nothing that you could possibly say could be too bad for him. I regard Henry as infamous, absolutely infamous. But I am bound to state, as you were remarking, Jane, that he is excellent company, and he has one of the best cooks in London, and after a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*to* MISS WORSLEY]. Now, do come, dear, and make friends with Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is one of the good, sweet, simple people you told us we never admitted into society. I am sorry to say Mrs. Arbuthnot comes very rarely to me. But that is not my fault.

MRS. ALLONBY. What a bore it is the men staying so long after dinner! I expect they are saying the most dreadful things about us.

LADY STUTFIELD. Do you really think so?

MRS. ALLONBY. I am sure of it.

LADY STUTFIELD. How very, very horrid of them! Shall we go on to the terrace?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, anything to get away from the dowagers and the dowdies. [*Rises and goes with* LADY STUTFIELD *to door* L.C.] We are only going to look at the stars, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You will find a great many, dear, a great many. But don't catch cold. [*To* MRS. ARBUTH-

NOT.] We shall all miss Gerald too much, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But has Lord Illingworth really offered to make Gerald his secretary?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Oh, yes! He has been most charming about it. He has the highest possible opinion of your boy. You don't know Lord Illingworth, I believe, dear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have never met him.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You know him by name, no doubt?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am afraid I don't. I live so much out of the world, and see so few people. I remember hearing years ago of an old Lord Illingworth who lived in Yorkshire, I think.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, yes. That would be the last Earl but one. He was a very curious man. He wanted to marry beneath him. Or wouldn't, I believe. There was some scandal about it. The present Lord Illingworth is quite different. He is very distinguished. He does — well, he does nothing, which I am afraid our pretty American visitor here thinks very wrong of anybody, and I don't know that he cares much for the subjects in which you are so interested, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. Do you think, Caroline, that Lord Illingworth is interested in the Housing of the Poor?

LADY CAROLINE. I should fancy not at all, Jane.

LADY HUNSTANTON. We all have our different tastes, have we not? But Lord Illingworth has a very high position, and there is nothing he couldn't get if he chose to ask for it. Of course, he is comparatively a young man still, and he has only come to his title within — how long exactly is it, Caroline, since Lord Illingworth succeeded?

LADY CAROLINE. About four years, I think, Jane. I know it was the same year in which my brother had his last exposure in the evening newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I remember. That would be about four years ago. Of course, there were a great many people between the present Lord Illingworth and the title, Mrs. Arbuthnot. There was — who was there, Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE. There was poor Margaret's baby. You remember how anxious she was to have a boy, and it was a boy, but it died, and her husband died shortly afterwards, and she married almost immediately one of Lord Ascot's sons, who, I am told, beats her.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, that is in the family, dear, that is in the family. And there was also, I remember, a clergyman who wanted to be a lunatic, or a lunatic who wanted to be a clergyman, I forget which, but I know the Court of Chancery investigated the matter, and decided that he was quite sane. And I saw him afterwards at poor Lord Plumstead's with straws in his hair, or something very odd about him. I can't recall what. I often regret, Lady Caroline, that dear Lady Cecilia never lived to see her son get the title.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Cecilia?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Lord Illingworth's mother, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, was one of the Duchess of Jerningham's pretty daughters, and she married Sir Thomas Harford, who wasn't considered a very good match for her at the time, though he was said to be the handsomest man in London. I knew them all quite intimately, and both the sons, Arthur and George.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was the eldest son who succeeded, of course, Lady Hunstanton?

LADY HUNSTANTON. No, dear, he was killed in the hunting field. Or was it fishing, Caroline? I forget. But George came in for everything. I always tell him that no younger son has ever had such good luck as he has had.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lady Hunstanton, I want to speak to Gerald at once. Might I see him? Can he be sent for?

LADY HUNSTANTON. Certainly, dear. I will send one of the servants into the dining-room to fetch him. I don't know what keeps the gentlemen so long. [*Rings bell.*] When I knew Lord Illingworth first as plain George Harford, he was simply a very brilliant young man about town, with not a penny of money

except what poor dear Lady Cecilia gave him. She was quite devoted to him. Chiefly, I fancy, because he was on bad terms with his father. Oh, here is the dear Archdeacon. [*To* SERVANT.] It doesn't matter.

[*Enter* SIR JOHN *and* DOCTOR DAUBENY. SIR JOHN *goes over to* LADY STUTFIELD, DOCTER DAUBENY *to* LADY HUNSTANTON.]

THE ARCHDEACON. Lord Illingworth has been most entertaining. I have never enjoyed myself more. [*Sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*to* DOCTOR DAUBENY]. You see I have got Mrs. Arbuthnot to come to me at last.

THE ARCHDEACON. That is a great honor, Lady Hunstanton. Mrs. Daubeny will be quite jealous of you.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am so sorry Mrs. Daubeny could not come with you to-night. Headache as usual, I suppose.

THE ARCHDEACON. Yes, Lady Hunstanton; a perfect martyr. But she is happiest alone. She is happiest alone.

LADY CAROLINE [*to her husband*]. John!

[SIR JOHN *goes over to his wife.* DOCTOR DAUBENY *talks to* LADY HUNSTANTON *and* MRS. ARBUTHNOT. MRS. ARBUTHNOT *watches* LORD ILLINGWORTH *the whole time. He has passed across the room without noticing her, and approaches* MRS. ALLONBY, *who with* LADY STUTFIELD *is standing by the door looking on to the terrace.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How is the most charming woman in the world?

MRS. ALLONBY [*taking* LADY STUTFIELD *by the hand*]. We are both quite well, thank you, Lord Illingworth. But what a short time you have been in the dining-room! It seems as if we had only just left.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was bored to death. Never opened my lips the whole time. Absolutely longing to come in to you.

MRS. ALLONBY. You should have. The American girl has been giving us a lecture.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Really? All Americans lecture, I believe. I suppose it is something in their climate. What did she lecture about?

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, Puritanism, of course.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am going to convert her, am I not? How long do you give me?

MRS. ALLONBY. A week.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. A week is more than enough.

[*Enter* GERALD *and* LORD ALFRED.]

GERALD [*going to* MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. Dear mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, I don't feel at all well. See me home, Gerald. I shouldn't have come.

GERALD. I am so sorry, mother. Certainly. But you must know Lord Illingworth first. [*Goes across room.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Not to-night, Gerald.

GERALD. Lord Illingworth, I want you so much to know my mother.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. With the greatest pleasure. [*To* MRS. ALLONBY.] I'll be back in a moment. People's mothers always bore me to death. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy.

MRS. ALLONBY. No man does. That is his.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a delightful mood you are in to-night!

[*Turns round and goes across with* GERALD *to* MRS. ARBUTHNOT. *When he sees her, he starts back in wonder. Then slowly his eyes turn towards* GERALD.]

GERALD. Mother, this is Lord Illingworth, who has offered to take me as his private secretary. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT *bows coldly.*] It is a wonderful opening for me, isn't it? I hope he won't be disappointed in me, that is all. You'll thank Lord Illingworth, mother, won't you?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth is very good, I am sure, to interest himself in you for the moment.

LORD ILLINGWORTH [*putting his hand on* GERALD'S *shoulder*]. Oh, Gerald and I

are great friends already, Mrs. . . . Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There can be nothing in common between you and my son, Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Dear mother, how can you say so? Of course, Lord Illingworth is awfully clever and that sort of thing. There is nothing Lord Illingworth doesn't know.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear boy!

GERALD. He knows more about life than any one I have ever met. I feel an awful duffer when I am with you, Lord Illingworth. Of course, I have had so few advantages. I have not been to Eton or Oxford like other chaps. But Lord Illingworth doesn't seem to mind that. He has been awfully good to me, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth may change his mind. He may not really want you as his secretary.

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You must remember, as you said yourself, you have had so few advantages.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth, I want to speak to you for a moment. Do come over.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Arbuthnot? Now, don't let your charming mother make any more difficulties, Gerald. The thing is quite settled, isn't it?

GERALD. I hope so.

[LORD ILLINGWORTH *goes across to* MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ALLONBY. I thought you were never going to leave the lady in black velvet.

LORD, ILLINGWORTH. She is excessively handsome.

[*Looks at* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Caroline, shall we all make a move to the music-room? Miss Worsley is going to play. You'll come, too, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, won't you? You don't know what a treat is in store for you. [*To* DOCTOR DAUBENY.] I must really take Miss Worsley down some afternoon to the rectory. I should so much like dear Mrs. Daubeny to hear her on the violin. Ah, I forgot. Dear Mrs. Daubeny's hearing is a little defective, is it not?

THE ARCHDEACON. Her deafness is a great privation to her. She can't even hear my sermons now. She reads them at home. But she has many resources in herself, many resources.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She reads a good deal, I suppose?

THE ARCHDEACON. Just the very largest print. The eyesight is rapidly going. But she's never morbid, never morbid.

GERALD [*to* LORD ILLINGWORTH]. Do speak to my mother, Lord Illingworth, before you go into the music-room. She seems to think, somehow, you don't mean what you said to me.

MRS. ALLONBY. Aren't you coming?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. In a few moments. Lady Hunstanton, if Mrs. Arbuthnot would allow me, I would like to say a few words to her, and we will join you later on.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, of course. You will have a great deal to say to her, and she will have a great deal to thank you for. It is not every son who gets such an offer, Mrs. Arbuthnot. But I know you appreciate that, dear.

LADY CAROLINE. John!

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, don't keep Mrs. Arbuthnot too long, Lord Illingworth. We can't spare her.

[*Exit following the other guests. Sound of violin heard from music-room.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So that is our son! Well, I am very proud of him. He is a Harford, every inch of him. By the way, why Arbuthnot, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. One name is as good as another, when one has no right to any name.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose so — but why Gerald?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. After a man whose heart I broke — after my father.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Well, Rachel, what is over is over. All I have got to say now is that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he will be something

very near, and very dear. It is a curious thing, Rachel; my life seemed to be quite complete. It was not so. It lacked something, it lacked a son. I have found my son now, I am glad I have found him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You have no right to claim him, or the smallest part of him. The boy is entirely mine, and shall remain mine.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, you have had him to yourself for over twenty years. Why not let me have him for a little now? He is quite as much mine as yours.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Are you talking of the child you abandoned? Of the child who, as far as you are concerned, might have died of hunger and of want?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You forget, Rachel, it was you who left me. It was not I who left you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I left you because you refused to give the child a name. Before my son was born, I implored you to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I had no expectations then. And besides, Rachel, I wasn't much older than you were. I was only twenty-two. I was twenty-one, I believe, when the whole thing began in your father's garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. When a man is old enough to do wrong he should be old enough to do right also.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing. As for saying I left our child to starve, that, of course, is untrue and silly. My mother offered you six hundred a year. But you wouldn't take anything. You simply disappeared, and carried the child away with you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I wouldn't have accepted a penny from her. Your father was different. He told you, in my presence, when we were in Paris, that it was your duty to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh, duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does one's self. Of course, I was influenced by my mother. Every man is when he is young.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am glad to hear you say so. Gerald shall certainly not go away with you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What nonsense, Rachel!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Do you think I would allow my son —

LORD ILLINGWORTH. *Our* son.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son [LORD ILLINGWORTH *shrugs his shoulders*] — to go away with the man who spoiled my youth, who ruined my life, who has tainted every moment of my days? You don't realize what my past has been in suffering and in shame.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. My dear Rachel, I must candidly say that I think Gerald's future considerably more important than your past.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald cannot separate his future from my past.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is exactly what he should do. That is exactly what you should help him to do. What a typical woman you are! You talk sentimentally, and you are thoroughly selfish the whole time. But don't let us have a scene. Rachel, I want you to look at this matter from the common-sense point of view, from the point of view of what is best for our son, leaving you and me out of the question. What is our son at present? An underpaid clerk in a small Provincial Bank in a third-rate English town. If you imagine he is quite happy in such a position, you are mistaken. He is thoroughly discontented.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He was not discontented till he met you. You have made him so.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Of course, I made him so. Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation. But I did not leave him with a mere longing for things he could not get. No, I made him a charming offer. He jumped at it, I need hardly say. Any young man would. And now, simply because it turns out that I am the boy's own father and he my own son, you propose practically to ruin his career. That is to say, if I were a perfect stranger you would allow Gerald to go away with

me, but as he is my own flesh and blood you won't. How utterly illogical you are!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not allow him to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How can you prevent it? What excuse can you give to him for making him decline such an offer as mine? I won't tell him in what relation I stand to him, I need hardly say. But you daren't tell him. You know that. Look how you have brought him up.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have brought him up to be a good man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Quite so. And what is the result? You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, an unjust judge he will be to you. Don't be deceived, Rachel. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. George, don't take my son away from me. I have had twenty years of sorrow, and I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy, and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us. There was no reason, according to your views of life, why you should have remembered us at all. Your meeting us was a mere accident, a horrible accident. Forget it. Don't come now, and rob me of . . . of all I have, of all I have in the whole world. You are so rich in other things. Leave me the little vineyard of my life; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water; the ewe-lamb God sent me, in pity or in wrath, Oh, leave me that, George; don't take Gerald from me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, at the present moment you are not necessary to Gerald's career; I am. There is nothing more to be said on the subject.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not let him go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Here is Gerald. He has a right to decide for himself.

[*Enter* GERALD.]

GERALD. Well, dear mother, I hope you have settled it all with Lord Illingworth?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have not, Gerald.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Your mother seems not to like your coming with me, for some reason.

GERALD. Why, mother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I thought you were quite happy here with me, Gerald. I didn't know you were so anxious to leave me.

GERALD. Mother, how can you talk like that? Of course I have been quite happy with you. But a man can't stay always with his mother. No chap does. I want to make myself a position, to do something. I thought you would have been proud to see me Lord Illingworth's secretary.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not think you would be suitable as a private secretary to Lord Illingworth. You have no qualifications.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't wish to seem to interfere for a moment, Mrs. Arbuthnot, but as far as your last objection is concerned, I surely am the best judge. And I can only tell you that your son has all the qualifications I had hoped for. He has more, in fact, than I had even thought of. Far more. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT *remains silent.*] Have you any other reason, Mrs. Arbuthnot, why you don't wish your son to accept this post?

GERALD. Have you, mother? Do answer.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you have, Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray, pray say it. We are quite by ourselves here. Whatever it is, I need not say I will not repeat it.

GERALD. Mother?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. If you would like to be alone with your son, I will leave you. You may have some other reason you don't wish me to hear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have no other reason.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then, my dear boy, we may look on the thing as settled. Come, you and I will smoke a cigarette on the terrace together. And

Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray let me tell you, that I think you have acted very, very wisely.

[*Exit with* Gerald. Mrs. Arbuthnot *is left alone. She stands immobile, with a look of unutterable sorrow on her face.*]

[curtain.]

ACT III

Scene.—*The Picture Gallery at Hunstanton. Door at back leading on to terrace.*

[Lord Illingworth *and* Gerald, r.c. Lord Illingworth *lolling on a sofa.* Gerald *in a chair.*]

Lord Illingworth. Thoroughly sensible woman, your mother, Gerald. I knew she would come round in the end.

Gerald. My mother is awfully conscientious, Lord Illingworth, and I know she doesn't think I am educated enough to be your secretary. She is perfectly right, too. I was fearfully idle when I was at school, and I couldn't pass an examination now to save my life.

Lord Illingworth. My dear Gerald, examinations are of no value whatsoever. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him.

Gerald. But I am so ignorant of the world, Lord Illingworth.

Lord Illingworth. Don't be afraid, Gerald. Remember that you've got on your side the most wonderful thing in the world—youth. There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in Life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it. Every one is born a king, and most people die in exile, like most kings. To win back my youth, Gerald, there is nothing I wouldn't do—except take exercise, get up early, or be a useful member of the community.

Gerald. But you don't call yourself old, Lord Illingworth?

Lord Illingworth. I am old enough to be your father, Gerald.

Gerald. I don't remember my father; he died years ago.

Lord Illingworth. So Lady Hunstanton told me.

Gerald. It is very curious, my mother never talks to me about my father. I sometimes think she must have married beneath her.

Lord Illingworth [*winces slightly*]. Really? [*Goes over and puts his hand on Gerald's shoulder.*] You have missed not having a father, I suppose, Gerald?

Gerald. Oh, no; my mother has been so good to me. No one ever had such a mother as I have had.

Lord Illingworth. I am quite sure of that. Still I should imagine that most mothers don't quite understand their sons. Don't realize, I mean, that a son has ambitions, a desire to see life, to make himself a name. After all, Gerald, you couldn't be expected to pass all your life in such a hole as Wrockley, could you?

Gerald. Oh, no. It would be dreadful.

Lord Illingworth. A mother's love is very touching, of course, but it is often curiously selfish. I mean, there is a good deal of selfishness in it.

Gerald [*slowly*]. I suppose there is.

Lord Illingworth. Your mother is a thoroughly good woman. But good women have such limited views of life, their horizon is so small, their interests are so petty, aren't they?

Gerald. They are awfully interested, certainly, in things we don't care much about.

Lord Illingworth. I suppose your mother is very religious, and that sort of thing.

Gerald. Oh, yes, she's always going to church.

Lord Illingworth. Ah! she is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being nowadays. You want to be modern, don't you, Gerald? You want to know life as it really is. Not to be put off with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society. A man who can

dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world. The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule.

GERALD. I should like to wear nice things awfully, but I have always been told that a man should not think too much about his clothes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. People nowadays are so absolutely superficial that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial. By the way, Gerald, you should learn how to tie your tie better. Sentiment is all very well for the button-hole. But the essential thing for a neck-tie is style. A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life.

GERALD [*laughing*]. I might be able to learn how to tie a tie, Lord Illingworth, but I should never be able to talk as you do. I don't know how to talk.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Oh! talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact.

GERALD. But it is very difficult to get into society, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people — that is all!

GERALD. I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. To be in it is merely a bore. But to be out of it simply a tragedy. Society is a necessary thing. No man has any real success in this world unless he has got women to back him, and women rule society. If you have not got women on your side you are quite over. You might just as well be a barrister, or a stockbroker, or a journalist at once.

GERALD. It is very difficult to understand women, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You should never try to understand them. Women are pictures. Men are problems. If you want to know what a woman really means — which, by the way, is always a dangerous thing to do — look at her, don't listen to her.

GERALD. But women are awfully clever, aren't they?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always tell them so. But, to the philosopher, my dear Gerald, women represent the triumph of matter over mind — just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals.

GERALD. How then can women have so much power as you say they have?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The history of women is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts.

GERALD. But haven't women got a refining influence?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Nothing refines but the intellect.

GERALD. Still, there are many different kinds of women, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Only two kinds in society: the plain and the colored.

GERALD. But there are good women in society, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Far too many.

GERALD. But do you think women shouldn't be good?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should never tell them so, they'd all become good at once. Women are a fascinatingly wilful sex. Every woman is a rebel, and usually in wild revolt against herself.

GERALD. You have never been married, Lord Illingworth, have you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed.

GERALD. But don't you think one can be happy when one is married?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Perfectly happy. But the happiness of a married man, my dear Gerald, depends on the people he has not married.

GERALD. But if one is in love?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.

GERALD. Love is a very wonderful thing, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. When one is in love one begins by deceiving one's self. And one ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. But

a really *grande passion* is comparatively rare nowadays. It is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes in a country, and the only possible explanation of us Harfords.

GERALD. Harfords, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. That is my family name. You should study the Peerage, Gerald. It is the one book a young man about town should know thoroughly, and it is the best thing in fiction the English have ever done. And now, Gerald, you are going now into a perfectly new life with me, and I want you to know how to live. [MRS. ARBUTHNOT *appears on terrace behind.*] For the world has been made by fools that wise men should live in it!

[*Enter* L.C. LADY HUNSTANTON *and* DOCTOR DAUBENY.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! here you are, dear Lord Illingworth. Well, I suppose you have been telling our young friend, Gerald, what his new duties are to be, and giving him a great deal of good advice over a pleasant cigarette.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been giving him the best of advice, Lady Hunstanton, and the best of cigarettes.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so sorry I was not here to listen to you, but I suppose I am too old now to learn. Except from you, dear Archdeacon, when you are in your nice pulpit. But then I always know what you are going to say, so I don't feel alarmed. [*Sees* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Ah! dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, do come and join us. Come, dear. [*Enter* MRS. ARBUTHNOT.] Gerald has been having such a long talk with Lord Illingworth; I am sure you must feel very much flattered at the pleasant way in which everything has turned out for him. Let us sit down. [*They sit down.*] And how is your beautiful embroidery going on?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I am always at work, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Mrs. Daubeny embroiders a little, too, doesn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She was very deft with her needle once, quite a Dorcas. But the gout has crippled her fingers a good deal. She has not touched the tambour frame for nine or ten years. But she has many other amusements. She is very much interested in her own health.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that is always a nice distraction, is it not? Now, what are you talking about, Lord Illingworth? Do tell us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was on the point of explaining to Gerald that the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of things.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now I am quite out of my depth. I usually am when Lord Illingworth says anything. And the Humane Society is most careless. They never rescue me. I am left to sink. I have a dim idea, dear Lord Illingworth, that you are always on the side of the sinners, and I know I always try to be on the side of the saints, but that is as far as I get. And, after all, it may be merely the fancy of a drowning person.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! that quite does for me. I haven't a word to say. You and I, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, are behind the age. We can't follow Lord Illingworth. Too much care was taken with our education, I am afraid. To have been well brought up is a great drawback nowadays. It shuts one out from so much.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I should be sorry to follow Lord Illingworth in any of his opinions.

LADY HUNSTANTON. You are quite right, dear.

[GERALD *shrugs his shoulders and looks irritably over at his mother. Enter* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY CAROLINE. Jane, have you seen John anywhere?

LADY HUNSTANTON. You needn't be anxious about him, dear. He is with Lady Stutfield; I saw them some time ago, in the Yellow Drawing-room. They seem quite happy together. You are not going, Caroline? Pray sit down.

LADY CAROLINE. I think I had better look after John.

[*Exit* LADY CAROLINE.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. It doesn't do to pay men so much attention. And Caroline has really nothing to be anxious about. Lady Stutfield is very sympathetic. She is just as sympathetic about one thing as she is about another. A beautiful nature. [*Enter* SIR JOHN *and* MRS. ALLONBY.]

Ah! here is Sir John! And with Mrs. Allonby, too! I suppose it was Mrs. Allonby I saw him with. Sir John, Caroline has been looking everywhere for you.

MRS. ALLONBY. We have been waiting for her in the Music-room, dear Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! the Music-room, of course. I thought it was the Yellow Drawing-room, my memory is getting so defective. [*To the* ARCHDEACON.] Mrs. Daubeny has a wonderful memory, hasn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON. She used to be quite remarkable for her memory, but since her last attack she recalls chiefly the events of her early childhood. But she finds great pleasure in such retrospections, great pleasure.

[*Enter* LADY STUTFIELD *and* MR. KELVIL.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! dear Lady Stutfield; and what has Mr. Kelvil been talking to you about.

LADY STUTFIELD. About Bimetallism, as well as I remember.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Bimetallism! Is that quite a nice subject? However, I know people discuss everything very freely nowadays. What did Sir John talk to you about, dear Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY. About Patagonia.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Really? What a remote topic! But very improving, I have no doubt.

MRS. ALLONBY. He has been most interesting on the subject of Patagonia. Savages seem to have quite the same views as cultured people on almost all subjects. They are excessively advanced.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What do they do?

MRS. ALLONBY. Apparently everything.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, it is very gratifying, dear Archdeacon, is it not, to find that Human Nature is permanently one. — On the whole, the world is the same world, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The world is simply divided into two classes — those who believe the incredible, like the public — and those who do the improbable —

MRS. ALLONBY. Like yourself?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Yes; I am always astonishing myself. It is the only thing that makes life worth living.

LADY STUTFIELD. And what have you been doing lately that astonishes you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I have been discovering all kinds of beautiful qualities in my own nature.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah! don't become quite perfect all at once. Do it gradually!

LORD ILLINGWOTTH. I don't intend to grow perfect at all. At least, I hope I shan't. It would be most inconvenient. Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them, they will forgive us everything, even our gigantic intellects.

MRS. ALLONBY. It is premature to ask us to forgive analysis. We forgive adoration; that is quite as much as should be expected from us.

[*Enter* LORD ALFRED. *He joins* LADY STUTFIELD.]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! we women should forgive everything, shouldn't we, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot? I am sure you agree with me in that.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not, Lady Hunstanton. I think there are many things women should never forgive.

LADY HUNSTANTON. What sort of things?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The ruin of another woman's life.

[*Moves slowly away to back of stage.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah! those things are very sad, no doubt, but I believe there are admirable homes where people of that kind are looked after and reformed, and I think on the whole that the secret of life is to take things very, very easily.

MRS. ALLONBY. The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.

LADY STUTFIELD. The secret of life is to appreciate the pleasure of being terribly, terribly deceived.

KELVIL. The secret of life is to resist temptation, Lady Stutfield.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. There is no secret of life. Life's aim, if it has one, is simply to be always looking for temptations. There are not nearly enough. I sometimes pass a whole day without coming across a single one. It is quite dreadful. It makes one so nervous about the future.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*shakes her fan at him*]. I don't know how it is, dear Lord Illingworth, but everything you have said to-day seems to be excessively immoral. It has been most interesting, listening to you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. All thought is immoral. It's the very essence of destruction. If you think of anything, you kill it. Nothing survives being thought of.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't understand a word, Lord Illingworth. But I have no doubt it is all quite true. Personally, I have very little to reproach myself with, on the score of thinking. I don't believe in women thinking too much. Women should think in moderation, as they should do all things in moderation.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Moderation is a fatal thing, Lady Hunstanton. Nothing succeeds like excess.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I hope I shall remember that. It sounds an admirable maxim. But I'm beginning to forget everything. It's a great misfortune.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is one of your most fascinating qualities, Lady Hunstanton. No woman should have a memory. Memory in a woman is the beginning of dowdiness. One can always tell from a woman's bonnet whether she has got a memory or not.

LADY HUNSTANTON. How charming you are, dear Lord Illingworth. You always find out that one's most glaring fault is one's most important virtue. You have the most comforting views of life.

[*Enter* FARQUHAR.]

FARQUHAR. Doctor Daubeny's carriage!

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear Archdeacon! It is only half-past ten.

THE ARCHDEACON [*rising*]. I am afraid I must go, Lady Hunstanton. Tuesday is always one of Mrs. Daubeny's bad nights.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*rising*]. Well, I won't keep you from her. [*Goes with him towards door.*] I have told Farquhar to put a brace of partridge into the carriage. Mrs. Daubeny may fancy them.

THE ARCHDEACON. It is very kind of you, but Mrs. Daubeny never touches solids now. Lives entirely on jellies. But she is wonderfully cheerful, wonderfully cheerful. She has nothing to complain of.

[*Exit with* LADY HUNSTANTON.]

MRS. ALLONBY [*goes over to* LORD ILLINGWORTH]. There is a beautiful moon to-night.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Let us go and look at it. To look at anything that is inconstant is charming nowadays.

MRS. ALLONBY. You have your looking-glass.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is unkind. It merely shows me my wrinkles.

MRS. ALLONBY. Mine is better behaved. It never tells me the truth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then it is in love with you.

[*Exeunt* SIR JOHN, LADY STUTFIELD, MR. KELVIL, *and* LORD ALFRED.]

GERALD [*to* LORD ILLINGWORTH]. May I come, too?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do, my dear boy.

[*Moves towards the door with* MRS. ALLONBY *and* GERALD.]

[LADY CAROLINE *enters, looks rapidly round and goes out in opposite direction to that taken by* SIR JOHN *and* LADY STUTFIELD.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald!

GERALD. What, mother!

[*Exit* LORD ILLINGWORTH *with* MRS. ALLONBY.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is getting late. Let us go home.

GERALD. My dear mother. Do let us wait a little longer. Lord Illingworth is so delightful, and, by the way, mother, I have a great surprise for you. We are starting for India at the end of this month.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let us go home.

GERALD. If you really want to, of course, mother, but I must bid good-bye to Lord Illingworth first. I'll be back in five minutes. [*Exit.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let him leave me if he chooses, but not with him — not with him! I couldn't bear it.

[*Walks up and down.*]

[*Enter* HESTER.]

HESTER. What a lovely night it is, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Is it?

HESTER. Mrs. Arbuthnot, I wish you would let us be friends. You are so different from the other women here. When you came into the Drawing-room this evening, somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life. I had been foolish. There are things that are right to say, but that may be said at the wrong time and to the wrong people.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I heard what you said. I agree with it, Miss Worsley.

HESTER. I didn't know you had heard it. But I knew you would agree with me. A woman who has sinned should be punished, shouldn't she?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. She shouldn't be allowed to come into the society of good men and women?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. She should not.

HESTER. And the man should be punished in the same way?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. In the same way. And the children, if there are children, in the same way also?

HESTER. Yes, it is right that the sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is a just law. It is God's law.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is one of God's terrible laws.

[*Moves away to fireplace.*]

HESTER. You are distressed about your son leaving you, Mrs. Arbuthnot?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

HESTER. Do you like him going away with Lord Illingworth? Of course there is position, no doubt, and money, but position and money are not everything, are they?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. They are nothing; they bring misery.

HESTER. Then why do you let your son go with him?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He wishes it himself.

HESTER. But if you asked him he would stay, would he not?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He has set his heart on going.

HESTER. He couldn't refuse you anything. He loves you too much. Ask him to stay. Let me send him to you. He is on the terrace at this moment with Lord Illingworth. I heard them laughing together as I passed through the Music-room.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't trouble, Miss Worsley, I can wait. It is of no consequence.

HESTER. No, I'll tell him you want him. Do — do ask him to stay.

[*Exit* HESTER.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He won't come — I know he won't come.

[*Enter* LADY CAROLINE. *She looks round anxiously.*]

[*Enter* GERALD.]

LADY CAROLINE. Mrs. Arbuthnot, may I ask you is Sir John anywhere on the terrace?

GERALD. No, Lady Caroline, he is not on the terrace.

LADY CAROLINE. It is very curious. It is time for him to retire.

[*Exit* LADY CAROLINE.]

GERALD. Dear mother, I am afraid I kept you waiting. I forgot all about it. I am so happy to-night, mother; I have never been so happy.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. At the prospect of going away?

GERALD. Don't put it like that, mother. Of course I am sorry to leave you. Why, you are the best mother in the whole world. But after all, as Lord Illingworth says, it is impossible to live in such a place as Wrockley. You don't mind it. But I'm ambitious; I want something more than that. I want to have a career. I want to do something that will make you proud of me, and Lord Illingworth is going to help me. He is going to do everything for me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, don't go away with Lord Illingworth. I implore you not to. Gerald, I beg you!

GERALD. Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for a single moment. An hour and a half ago in the Drawing-room you agreed to the whole thing; now you turn round and make objections, and try to force me to give up my one chance in life. Yes, my one chance. You don't suppose that men like Lord Illingworth are to be found every day, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother. Besides, you know, mother, I love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could — I could ask her to — Don't you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth's secretary? To start like that is to find a career ready for one — before one — waiting for one. If I were Lord Illingworth's secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife. As a watched bank clerk with a hundred a year it would be an impertinence.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I fear you need have no hopes of Miss Worsley. I know her views on life. She has just told them to me. [*A pause.*]

GERALD. Then I have my ambition left, at any rate. That is something — I am glad I have that! You have always tried to crush my ambition, mother — haven't you? You have told me that the world is a wicked place, that success is not worth having, that society is shallow, and all that sort of thing — well, I don't believe it, mother. I think the world must be delightful. I think society must be exquisite. I think success is a thing worth having. You have been wrong in all that you taught me, mother, quite wrong. Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I would sooner see you dead.

GERALD. Mother, what is your objection to Lord Illingworth? Tell me — tell me right out. What is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He is a bad man.

GERALD. In what way bad? I don't understand what you mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will tell you.

GERALD. I suppose you think him bad because he doesn't believe the same things as you do. Well, men are different from women, mother. It is natural that they should have different views.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is not what Lord Illingworth believes, or what he does not believe, that makes him bad. It is what he is.

GERALD. Mother, is it something you know of him? Something you actually know?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is something I know.

GERALD. Something you are quite sure of?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Quite sure of.

GERALD. How long have you known it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For twenty years.

GERALD. Is it fair to go back twenty years in any man's career? And what have you or I to do with Lord Illingworth's early life? What business is it of ours?

Mrs. Arbuthnot. What this man has been, he is now, and will be always.

Gerald. Mother, tell me what Lord Illingworth did? If he did anything shameful, I will not go away with him. Surely you know me well enough for that?

Mrs. Arbuthnot. Gerald, come near to me. Quite close to me, as you used to do when you were a little boy, when you were mother's own boy. [Gerald *sits down beside his mother. She runs her fingers through his hair, and strokes his hands.*] Gerald, there was a girl once, she was very young, she was little over eighteen at the time. George Harford — that was Lord Illingworth's name then — George Harford met her. She knew nothing about life. He — knew everything. He made this girl love him. He made her love him so much that she left her father's house with him one morning. She loved him so much, and he had promised to marry her! He had solemnly promised to marry her, and she had believed him. She was very young, and — and ignorant of what life really is. But he put the marriage off from week to week, and month to month. — She trusted in him all the while. She loved him. — Before her child was born — for she had a child — she implored him for the child's sake to marry her, that the child might have a name, that her sin might not be visited on the child, who was innocent. He refused. After the child was born she left him, taking the child away, and her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly — she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The world cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can heal her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul! — That is why I call Lord Illingworth a bad man. That is why I don't want my boy to be with him.

Gerald. My dear mother, it all sounds very tragic, of course. But I dare say the girl was just as much to blame as Lord Illingworth was. — After all, would a really nice girl, a girl with any nice feelings at all, go away from her home with a man to whom she was not married, and live with him as his wife? No nice girl would.

Mrs. Arbuthnot [*after a pause*]. Gerald, I withdraw all my objections. You are at liberty to go away with Lord Illingworth, when and where you choose.

Gerald. Dear mother, I knew you wouldn't stand in my way. You are the best woman God ever made. And, as for Lord Illingworth, I don't believe he is capable of anything infamous or base. I can't believe it of him — I can't.

Hester [*outside*]. Let me go! Let me go!

[*Enter* Hester *in terror, and rushes over to* Gerald *and flings herself in his arms.*]

Hester. Oh! save me — save me from him!

Gerald. From whom?

Hester. He has insulted me! Horribly insulted me! Save me!

Gerald. Who? Who has dared — ?

[Lord Illingworth *enters at back of stage.* Hester *breaks from* Gerald's *arms and points to him.*]

Gerald [*he is quite beside himself with rage and indignation*]. Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God's earth, a thing as pure as my own mother. You have insulted the woman I love most in the world with my own mother. As there is a God in heaven, I will kill you!

Mrs. Arbuthnot [*rushing across and catching hold of him*]. No! no!

Gerald [*thrusting her back*]. Don't hold me, mother. Don't hold me — I'll kill him!

Mrs. Arbuthnot. Gerald!

Gerald. Let me go, I say!

Mrs. Arbuthnot. Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father.

[Gerald *clutches his mother's hands and looks into her face. She sinks*

slowly on the ground in shame. HESTER *steals towards the door.* LORD ILLINGWORTH *frowns and bites his lip. After a time* GERALD *raises his mother up, puts his arm round her, and leads her from the room.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Sitting-room at* MRS. ARBUTHNOT'S. *Large open French window at back, looking on to garden. Doors* R.C. *and* L.C.

[GERALD ARBUTHNOT *writing at table.*]

Enter ALICE R.C., *followed by* LADY HUNSTANTON *and* MRS. ALLONBY.

ALICE. Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby. [*Exit.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON. Good morning, Gerald.

GERALD [*rising*]. Good morning, Lady Hunstanton. Good morning, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*sitting down*]. We came to inquire for your dear mother, Gerald. I hope she is better?

GERALD. My mother has not come down yet, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Ah, I am afraid the heat was too much for her last night. I think there must have been thunder in the air. Or perhaps it was the music. Music makes one feel so romantic — at least it always gets on one's nerves.

MRS. ALLONBY. It's the same thing, now-a-days.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I am so glad I don't know what you mean, dear. I am afraid you mean something wrong. Ah, I see you're examining Mrs. Arbuthnot's pretty room. Isn't it nice and old-fashioned?

MRS. ALLONBY [*surveying the room through her lorgnette*]. It looks quite the happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. That's just the word, dear; that just describes it. One feels your mother's good influence in everything she has about her, Gerald.

MRS. ALLONBY. Lord Illingworth says that all influence is bad, but that a good influence is the worst in the world.

LADY HUNSTANTON. When Lord Illingworth knows Mrs. Arbuthnot better, he will change his mind. I must certainly bring him here.

MRS. ALLONBY. I should like to see Lord Illingworth in a happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON. It would do him a great deal of good, dear. Most women in London, now-a-days, seem to furnish their homes with nothing but orchids, foreigners, and French novels. But here we have the room of a sweet saint. Fresh natural flowers, books that don't shock one, pictures that one can look at without blushing.

MRS. ALLONBY. But I like blushing.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, there *is* a good deal to be said for blushing, if one can do it at the proper moment. Poor dear Hunstanton used to tell me I didn't blush nearly often enough. But then he was very particular. He wouldn't let me know any of his men friends, except those who were over seventy, like poor Lord Ashton: who afterwards, by the way, was brought into the Divorce Court. A most unfortunate case.

MRS. ALLONBY. I delight in men over seventy. They always offer one the devotion of a lifetime. I think seventy an ideal age for a man.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She is quite incorrigible, Gerald, isn't she? By-the-by, Gerald, I hope your dear mother will come and see me more often now. You and Lord Illingworth start almost immediately, don't you?

GERALD. I have given up my intention of being Lord Illingworth's secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Surely not, Gerald! It would be most unwise of you. What reason can you have?

GERALD. I don't think I should be suitable for the post.

MRS. ALLONBY. I wish Lord Illingworth would ask me to be his secretary. But he says I am not serious enough.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, you really mustn't talk like that in this house. Mrs. Arbuthnot doesn't know anything about the wicked society in which we

all live. She won't go into it. She is far too good. I consider it was a great honor her coming to me last night. It gave quite an atmosphere of respectability to the party.

MRS. ALLONBY. Ah, that must have been what you thought was thunder in the air.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear, how can you say that? There is no resemblance between the two things at all. But really, Gerald, what do you mean by not being suitable?

GERALD. Lord Illingworth's views of life and mine are too different.

LADY HUNSTANTON. But, my dear Gerald, at your age you shouldn't have any views of life. They are quite out of place. You must be guided by others in this matter. Lord Illingworth has made you the most flattering offer, and travelling with him you would see the world — as much of it, at least, as one should look at — under the best auspices possible, and stay with all the right people, which is so important at this solemn moment in your career.

GERALD. I don't want to see the world: I've seen enough of it.

MRS. ALLONBY. I hope you don't think you have exhausted life, Mr. Arbuthnot. When a man says that one knows what life has exhausted him.

GERALD. I don't wish to leave my mother.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Now, Gerald, that is pure laziness on your part. Not leave your mother! If I were your mother I would insist on your going.

[*Enter* ALICE.]

ALICE. Mrs. Arbuthnot's compliments, my lady, but she has a bad headache, and cannot see any one, this morning.

[*Exit.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON [*rising*]. A bad headache! I am so sorry! Perhaps you'll bring her up to Hunstanton this afternoon, if she is better, Gerald.

GERALD. I am afraid not this afternoon, lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON. Well, to-morrow, then. Ah, if you had a father, Gerald, he wouldn't let you waste your life here. He would send you off with Lord Illingworth at once. But mothers are so weak. They give up to their sons in everything. We are all heart, all heart. Come, dear, I must call at the rectory and inquire for Mrs. Daubeny, who, I am afraid, is far from well. It is wonderful how the Archdeacon bears up, quite wonderful. He is the most sympathetic of husbands. Quite a model. Good-bye. Gerald, give my fondest love to your mother.

MRS. ALLONBY. Good-bye, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt* LADY HUNSTANTON *and* MRS. ALLONBY. GERALD *sits down and reads over his letter.*]

GERALD. What name can I sign? Nobody who have no right to any name.

[*Signs name, puts letter into envelope, addresses it, and is about to seal it, when door* L.C. *opens, and* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *enters.* GERALD *lays down sealing-wax. Mother and son look at each other.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON [*Through French window at back*]. Good-bye again, Gerald. We are taking the short cut across your pretty garden. Now, remember my advice to you — start at once with Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ALLONBY. *Au revoir,* Mr. Arbuthnot. Mind you bring me back something nice from your travels — not an Indian shawl — on no account an Indian shawl. [*Exeunt.*]

GERALD. Mother, I have just written to him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. To whom?

GERALD. To my father. I have written to tell him to come here at four o'clock this afternoon.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He shall not come here. He shall not cross the threshold of my house.

GERALD. He must come.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Gerald, if you are going away with Lord Illingworth, go at once. Go before it kills me: but don't ask me to meet him.

GERALD. Mother, you don't understand. Nothing in the world would induce me

to go away with Lord Illingworth, or to leave you. Surely you know me well enough for that. No: I have written to him to say—

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What can you have to say to him?

GERALD. Can't you guess, mother, what I have written in this letter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

GERALD. Mother, surely you can. Think, think what must be done, now, at once, within the next few days.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is nothing to be done.

GERALD. I have written to Lord Illingworth to tell him that he must marry you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Marry me?

GERALD. Mother, I will force him to do it. The wrong that has been done you must be repaired. Atonement must be made. Justice may be slow, mother, but it comes in the end. In a few days you shall be Lord Illingworth's lawful wife.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald—

GERALD. I will insist upon his doing it. I will make him do it: he will not dare to refuse.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But, Gerald, it is I who refuse. I will not marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. Not marry him? Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. But you don't understand: it is for your sake I am talking, not for mine. This marriage, this necessary marriage, this marriage that, for obvious reasons, must inevitably take place, will not help me, will not give me a name that will be really, rightly mine to bear. But surely it will be something for you, that you, my mother, should, however late, become the wife of the man who is my father. Will not that be something?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not marry him.

GERALD. Mother, you must.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I will not. You talk of atonement for a wrong done. What atonement can be made for me? There is no atonement possible. I am disgraced: he is not. That is all. It is the usual history of a man and a woman as it usually happens, as it always happens. And the ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free.

GERALD. I don't know if that is the ordinary ending, mother: I hope it is not. But your life, at any rate, shall not end like that. The man shall make whatever reparation is possible. It is not enough. It does not wipe out the past, I know that. But at least it makes the future better, better for you, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I refuse to marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD. If he came to you himself and asked you to be his wife you would give him a different answer. Remember, he is my father.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. If he came himself which he will not do, my answer would be the same. Remember I am your mother.

GERALD. Mother, you make it terribly difficult for me by talking like that, and I can't understand why you won't look at this matter from the right, from the only proper, standpoint. It is to take away the bitterness out of your life, to take away the shadow that lies on your name, that this marriage must take place. There is no alternative; and after the marriage you and I can go away together. But the marriage must take place first. It is a duty that you owe not merely to yourself, but to all other women—yes: to all the other women in the world, lest he betray more.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I owe nothing to other women. There is not one of them to help me. There is not one woman in the world to whom I could go for pity, if I would take it, or for sympathy, if I could win it. Women are hard on each other. That girl, last night, good though she is, fled from the room as though I were a tainted thing. She was right. I am a tainted thing. But my wrongs are my own, and I will bear them alone. I must bear them alone. What have women who have not sinned to do with me, or I with them? We do not understand each other.

[*Enter* HESTER *behind.*]

GERALD. I implore you to do what I sk you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What son has ever sked of his mother to make so hideous sacrifice? None.

GERALD. What mother has ever re-used to marry the father of her own hild? None.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Let me be the first, hen. I will not do it.

GERALD. Mother, you believe in re-igion, and you brought me up to be-ieve in it also. Well, surely your eligion, the religion that you taught me vhen I was a boy, mother, must tell ou that I am right. You know it, you eel it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I do not know it. I lo not feel it, or will I ever stand efore God's altar and ask God's blessing n so hideous a mockery as a marriage etween me and George Harford. I will ot say the words the Church bids us o say. I will not say them. I dare not. Iow could I swear to love the man I ɔathe, to honor him who wrought you ishonor, to obey him who, in his mas-ery, made me to sin? No: marriage is sacrament for those who love each ther. It is not for such as him, or such s me. Gerald, to save you from the orld's sneers and taunts I have lied to ıe world. For twenty years I have ed to the world. I could not tell the orld the truth. Who can, ever? But ot for my own sake will I lie to God, ıd in God's presence. No, Gerald, no eremony, Church-hallowed or State-ıade, shall ever bind me to George Har-ɔrd. It may be that I am too bound ɔ him already, who, robbing me, yet ɛft me richer, so that in the mire of ıy life, I found the pearl of price, or hat I thought would be so.

GERALD. I don't understand you now.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Men don't under-and what mothers are. I am no differ-ıt from other women except in the rong done me and the wrong I did, and y very heavy punishments and great sgrace. And yet, to bear you I had to ok on death. To nurture you I had to wrestle with it. Death fought with me for you. All women have to fight with death to keep their children. Death, being childless, wants our children from us. Gerald, when you were naked I clothed you, when you were hungry I gave you food. Night and day all that long winter I tended you. No office is too mean, no care too lowly for the thing we women love — and oh! how *I* loved *you*. Not Hannah Samuel more. And you needed love, for you were weakly, and only love could have kept you alive. Only love can keep anyone alive. And boys are careless often and without thinking give pain, and we always fancy that when they come to man's estate and know us better, they will repay us. But it is not so. The world draws them from our side, and they make friends with whom they are happier than they are with us, and have amusements from which we are barred, and interests that are not ours: and they are unjust to us often, for when they find life bitter they blame us for it, and when they find it sweet we do not taste its sweetness with them. . . . You made many friends and went into their houses and were glad with them, and I, knowing my secret, did not dare to follow, but stayed at home and closed the door, shut out the sun and sat in darkness. What should I have done in honest households? My past was ever with me. . . . And you thought I didn't care for the pleasant things of life. I tell you I longed for them, but I did not dare to touch them, feeling I had no right. You thought I was happier working amongst the poor. That was my mission, you imagined. It was not, but where else was I to go? The sick do not ask if the hand that smoothes their pillow is pure, nor the dying care if the lips that touch their brow have known the kiss of sin. It was you I thought of all the time; I gave to them the love you did not need: lavished on them a love that was not theirs. And you thought I spent too much of my time in going to church, and in church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome,

and you were always in my heart, Gerald, too much in my heart. For, though day after day, at morn or evensong, I have knelt in God's house, I have never repented of my sin. How could I repent of my sin when you, my love, were its fruit! Even now that you are bitter to me I cannot repent. I do not. You are more to me than innocence. I would rather be your mother — oh! much rather! — than have been always pure. . . . Oh, don't you see? don't you understand? Is it my dishonor that has made you so dear to me. It is my disgrace that has bound you so closely to me. It is the price I paid for you — the price of soul and body — that makes me love you as I do. Oh, don't ask me to do this horrible thing. Child of my shame, be still the child of my shame!

GERALD. Mother, I didn't know you loved me so much as that. And I will be a better son to you than I have been. And you and I must never leave each other . . . but, mother . . . I can't help it . . . you must become my father's wife. You must marry him. It is your duty.

HESTER [*running forward and embracing* MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. No, no: you shall not. That would be real dishonor, the first you have ever known. That would be real disgrace: the first to touch you. Leave him and come with me. There are other countries than England. . . . Oh! other countries over sea, better, wiser, and less unjust lands. The world is very wide and very big.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No, not for me. For me the world is shrivelled to a palm's breadth, and where I walk there are thorns.

HESTER. It shall not be so. We shall somewhere find green valleys and fresh waters, and if we weep, well, we shall weep together. Have we not both loved him?

GERALD. Hester!

HESTER [*waving him back*]. Don't, don't! You cannot love me at all, unless you love her also. You cannot honor me, unless she's holier to you. In her all womanhood is martyred. Not she alone, but all of us are stricken in her house.

GERALD. Hester, Hester, what shall I do?

HESTER. Do you respect the man who is your father?.

GERALD. Respect him? I despise him! He is infamous!

HESTER. I thank you for saving me from him last night.

GERALD. Ah, that is nothing! I would die to save you. But you don't tell me what to do now!

HESTER. Have I not thanked you for saving *me?*

GERALD. But what should I do?

HESTER. Ask your own heart, not mine. I never had a mother to save, or shame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He is hard — he is hard. Let me go away.

GERALD [*rushes over and kneels down beside his mother*]. Mother, forgive me: I have been to blame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't kiss my hands: they are cold. My heart is cold: something has broken it.

HESTER. Ah, don't say that. Hearts live by being wounded. Pleasure may turn a heart to stone, riches may make it callous, but sorrow — oh, sorrow cannot break it. Besides, what sorrows have you now? Why, at this moment you are more dear to him than ever, *dear* though you have *been,* and oh! how dear you *have* been always. Ah! be kind to him.

GERALD. You are my mother and my father all in one. I need no second parent. It was for you I spoke, for you alone. Oh, say something, mother. Have I but found one love to lose another? Don't tell me that. O mother, you are cruel.

[*Gets up and flings himself sobbing on a sofa.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [*to* HESTER]. But has he found indeed another love?

HESTER. You know I have loved him always.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are very poor.

HESTER. Who, being loved, is poor? Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They

are a burden. Let him share it with me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. But we are disgraced. We rank among the outcasts. Gerald is nameless. The sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is God's law.

HESTER. I was wrong. God's law is only Love.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. [*rises, and taking* HESTER *by the hand, goes slowly over to where* GERALD *is lying on the sofa with his head buried in his hands. She touches him and he looks up*]. Gerald, I cannot give you a father, but I have brought you a wife.

GERALD. Mother, I am not worthy either of her or you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. So she comes first, you are worthy. And when you are away, Gerald . . . with . . . her — oh, think of me sometimes. Don't forget me. And when you pray, pray for me. We should pray when we are happiest, and you will be happy, Gerald.

HESTER. Oh, you don't think of leaving us?

GERALD. Mother, you won't leave us?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I might bring shame upon you!

GERALD. Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For a little then: and if you let me, near you always.

HESTER [*to* MRS. ARBUTHNOT]. Come out with us to the garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Later on, later on.

[*Exeunt* HESTER *and* GERALD.]

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *goes towards door* L.C. *Stops at looking-glass over mantelpiece and looks into it.*]

[*Enter* ALICE R.C.]

ALICE. A gentleman to see you, ma'am.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Say I am not at home. Show me the card. [*Takes card from salver and looks at it.*] Say I will not see him.

[LORD ILLINGWORTH *enters.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *sees him in the glass and starts, but does not turn round.*

[*Exit* ALICE.]

What can you have to say to me today, George Harford? You can have nothing to say to me. You must leave this house.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, Gerald knows everything about you and me now, so some arrangement must be come to that will suit us all three. I assure you, he will find in me the most charming and generous of fathers.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My son may come in at any moment. I saved you last night. I may not be able to save you again. My son feels my dishonor strongly, terribly strongly. I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH [*sitting down*]. Last night was excessively unfortunate. That silly Puritan girl making a scene merely because I wanted to kiss her. What harm is there in a kiss?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT [*turning round*]. A kiss may ruin a human life, George Harford. *I* know that, *I* know that too well.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. We won't discuss that at present. What is of importance to-day, as yesterday, is still our son. I am extremely fond of him, as you know, and odd though it may seem to you, I admired his conduct last night immensely. He took up the cudgels for that pretty prude with wonderful promptitude. He is just what I should have liked a son of mine to be. Except that no son of mine should ever take the side of the Puritans; that is always an error. Now, what I propose is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Lord Illingworth, no proposition of yours interests me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. According to our ridiculous English laws, I can't legitimize Gerald. But I can leave him my property. Illingworth is entailed, of course, but it is a tedious barrack of a place. He can have Ashby, which is much prettier, Harborough which has the best shooting in the north of England, and the house in St. James's Square. What more can a gentleman desire in this world?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing more, I am quite sure.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. As for a title, a title is really rather a nuisance in these democratic days. As George Harford I had everything I wanted. Now I have merely everything that other people want, which isn't nearly so pleasant. Well, my proposal is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I told you I was not interested, and I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. The boy is to be with you for six months in the year, and with me for the other six. That is perfectly fair, is it not? You can have whatever allowance you like, and live where you choose. As for your past, no one knows anything about it except myself and Gerald. There is the Puritan, of course, the Puritan in white muslin, but she doesn't count. She couldn't tell the story without explaining that she objected to being kissed, could she? And all the women would think her a fool and the men think her a bore. And you need not be afraid that Gerald won't be my heir. I needn't tell you I have not the slightest intention of marrying.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You come too late. My son has no need of you. You are not necessary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What do you mean, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That you are not necessary to Gerald's career. He does not require you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I do not understand you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Look into the garden. [LORD ILLINGWORTH *rises and goes towards window.*] You had better not let them see you: you bring unpleasant memories. [LORD ILLINGWORTH *looks out and starts.*] She loves him. They love each other. We are safe from you, and we are going away.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Where?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. We will not tell you, and if you find us we will not know you. You seem surprised. What welcome would you get from the girl whose lips you tried to soil, from the boy whose life you have shamed, from the mother whose dishonor comes from you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You have grown hard, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I was too weak once. It is well for me that I have changed.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I was very young at that time. We men know life too early.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. And we women know life too late. That is the difference between men and women.

[*A pause.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Rachel, I want my son. My money may be of no use to him now. I may be of no use to him, but I want my son. Bring us together, Rachel. You can do it if you choose.

[*Sees letter on table.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. There is no room in my boy's life for *you*. He is not interested in *you*.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Then why does he write to me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. What do you mean?

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What letter is this? [*Takes up letter.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. That — is nothing. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is addressed to *me*.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are not to open it. I forbid you to open it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And in Gerald's handwriting.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was not to have been sent. It is a letter he wrote to you this morning before he saw me. But he is sorry now he wrote it, very sorry. You are not to open it. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It belongs to me. [*Opens it, sits down and reads it slowly.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *watches him all the time.*] You have read this letter, I suppose, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. You know what is in it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I don't admit for a moment that the boy is right in what he says. I don't admit that it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely. But to get my son back I am

ready — yes, I am ready to marry you, Rachel — and to treat you always with the deference and respect due to my wife. I will marry you as soon as you choose. I give you my word of honor.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You made that promise to me once before and broke it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I will keep it now. And that will show you that I love my son, at least as much as you love him. For when I marry you, Rachel, there are some ambitions I shall have to surrender. High ambitions, too, if any ambition is high.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I decline to marry you, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Are you serious?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Do tell me your reasons. They would interest me enormously.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. I have already explained them to my son.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I suppose they were intensely sentimental, weren't they? You women live by your emotions and for them. You have no philosophy of life.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. You are right. We women live by our emotions and for them. By our passions, and for them, if you will. I have two passions, Lord Illingworth: my love of him, my hate of you. You cannot kill those. They feed each other.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What sort of love is that which needs to have hate as its brother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It is the sort of love I have for Gerald. Do you think that terrible? Well, it is terrible. All love is terrible. All love is a tragedy. I loved you once, Lord Illingworth. Oh, what a tragedy for a woman to have loved you!

LORD ILLINGWORTH. So you really refuse to marry me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. Because you hate me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. And does my son hate me as you do?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. I am glad of that, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. He merely despises you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What a pity! What a pity for him, I mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Don't be deceived, George. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely if ever do they forgive them.

LORD ILLINGWORTH [*reads letter over again, very slowly*]. May I ask by what arguments you made the boy who wrote this letter, this beautiful, passionate letter, believe that you should not marry his father, the father of your own child?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. It was not I who made him see it. It was another.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. What *fin-de-siècle* person?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. The Puritan, Lord Illingworth. [*A pause.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH [*winces, then rises slowly and goes over to table where his hat and gloves are.* MRS. ARBUTHNOT *is standing close to the table. He picks up one of the gloves and begins putting it on.*] There is not much for me to do here, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. Nothing.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. It is good-bye, is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. For ever, I hope, this time, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH. How curious! Ah! this moment you look exactly as you looked the night you left me twenty years ago. You have just the same expression in your mouth. Upon my word, Rachel, no woman ever loved me as you did. Why, you gave yourself to me like a flower, to do anything I liked with. You were the prettiest of playthings, the most fascinating of small romances. . . . [*Pulls out watch.*] Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hunstanton. Don't suppose I shall see you there again. I'm sorry, I am, really. It's been an amusing experience to have met amongst people of one's own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one's mistress, and one's —

[MRS. ARBUTHNOT *snatches up glove and strikes* LORD ILLINGWORTH *across the face with it.* LORD ILLINGWORTH *starts. He is dazed by the insult of his punishment. Then he controls himself, and goes to window and looks out at his son. Sighs, and leaves the room.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT [*falls sobbing on the sofa*]. He would have said it. He would have said it.

[*Enter* GERALD *and* HESTER *from the garden.*]

GERALD. Well, dear mother. You never came out after all. So we have come in to fetch you. Mother, you have not been crying?

[*Kneels down beside her.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT. My boy! My boy! My boy!

[*Running her fingers through his hair.*]

HESTER [*coming over*]. But you have two children now. You'll let me be your daughter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT [*looking up*]. Would you choose me for a mother?

HESTER. You of all women I have ever known.

[*They move towards the door leading into garden with their arms round each other's waist.* GERALD *goes to table* L.C. *for his hat. On turning round he sees* LORD ILLINGWORTH'S *glove lying on the floor, and picks it up.*]

GERALD. Hallo, mother, whose glove is this? You have had a visitor. Who was it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT [*turning round*]. Oh! no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance.

CURTAIN

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Other plays containing wit and melodramatic situations:

Lady Windermere's Fan (Oscar Wilde)
The Devil's Disciple (Bernard Shaw)
These Charming People (Michael Arlen)

QUESTIONS ON "A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE"

1. Make a list of ten epigrams from the play.
2. Cite instances of Wilde's cynicism and sentimentalism.
3. What is the problem of the play? Does Wilde offer a solution?
4. Point out the melodramatic elements in the play.
5. How true to life are the characters?
6. Discuss Wilde's style.

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

Henry Arthur Jones was born in 1851 and died at Hampstead, near London, on January 8, 1929. His father, a Buckinghamshire farmer of average means, could provide for the future dramatist only an elementary education; but Jones was an insatiable reader and made an independent and intelligent study of the drama. Between 1878 and 1912 he wrote more than fifty plays, but in recent years contributed infrequently to the stage. In addition to plays Jones wrote various books dealing with the drama, notably *The Renascence of the English Drama* (1895) and *Foundations of a National Theatre* (1912), and was a tireless lecturer and propagandist for an intelligent English theatre.

Jones's long list of plays may be divided into three main classes: pure melodrama, such as *The Silver King* (1882); dramas of character and serious implication, often with a dash of melodrama, such as *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896); and drawing-room comedies of manners in which the foibles of "society" are dealt with in a witty but rather harmless way, such as *The Liars* (1897). *Mrs. Dane's Defence* belongs to the second category. Although called by its author a comedy, the play is by no means dominated by the strictly comic element, for it is both very dramatic and serious. The pharisaical Mrs. Bulsom-Porter is less amusing than repellent; the devotion of Lionel to Mrs. Dane is not laughable; both of these lovers are pictured so sympathetically that no amount of "the comic spirit" can make us view their separation impassively. The earlier part of the play has a detective-story interest which rises consistently to the very effective cross-questioning scene in the third act — a scene more thrilling than most melodramas although only dialogue is employed.

Like Pinero, Jones is a master of dramatic technique: he knows how to tell a dramatic story with economy and great effectiveness. If some of his methods seem a little obvious to-day — the over-use of the *raisonneur,* for example; if he settles the serious problems of life with too great a facility — sometimes with a platitude; if there is a manifest striving for scenic and comic effect; if there is a Victorian timidity that balks at an unconditional scrutiny of social and moral issues — we must bear in mind that Jones is a transitional dramatist and with Pinero is largely responsible for elevating the English theatre to intelligent levels after its hundred years of what was nearly insignificance. It is noteworthy also that, with no palpable foreign influences, he gradually abandoned such stagey devices as the soliloquy, the aside, and rhetoric as his art matured.

Modern critics, although usually cognizant of Mr. Jones's service to the drama, often estimate his plays somewhat harshly, sometimes, perhaps, unjustly. Mr. William Archer finds in his plays "a lack of intellectual subtlety, a search after scenic effect of the picture-postal order, which greatly detract from their ultimate value." Mr. P. P. Howe in speaking of Jones's most brilliant comedy says, "The dramatist of *The Liars* knew the names of all the wines and sauces but very little about the heart of man." In spite of his defects Jones has won a definite place in the dramatic literature of England not only by contributing a long series of plays that provide intelligent entertainment, but also by laboring sedulously for copyright and censorship reform, for the more general printing and circulation of plays, and for the elevation of public taste. He is among the crusaders who have helped free the theatre and actor from Victorian suspicion and again raise the stage to its proper level of dignity and respect in a civilized society.

MRS. DANE'S DEFENCE
(1900)

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

CHARACTERS

SIR DANIEL (MR. JUSTICE) CARTERET
LIONEL CARTERET, *his adopted son*
CANON BONSEY, *vicar of Sunningwater*
MR. BULSOM-PORTER
MR. JAMES RISBY
MR. FENDICK, *a private inquiry agent*
ADAMS, *butler at Lady Eastney's*
WILSON, *butler at Sir Daniel's*
MRS. DANE
MRS. BULSOM-PORTER
JANET COLQUHOUN, *niece to Lady Eastney*
LADY EASTNEY

ACT I: The blue drawing-room at Lady Eastney's. Night.

ACT II: The same on an afternoon two or three weeks later.

ACT III: Library at Sir Daniel's on the following Wednesday afternoon.

ACT IV: The same, on the following Saturday evening.

The whole of the action takes place at Sunningwater, about twenty-five miles from London, in the present day.

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MRS. DANE'S DEFENCE

ACT I

The blue drawing-room at LADY EASTNEY'S, *Sunningwater. A very brightly furnished room in a country house about twenty miles from London. At back are doors opening into a conservatory which is lighted up. On the right side are French windows opening upon a lawn. On the left side up stage is a door opening off into the large drawing-room. This door is curtained. When it is opened a buzz of conversation, as from a reception, is heard. Down stage on the left side is a fire-place. Time after dinner on an evening in July. The doors are all open. A violin is played off as if it were two rooms away.* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER, *a lady of forty-five, enters showing great irritation. She seats herself, on sofa, and fans herself. A moment or two later,* MR. BULSOM-PORTER *enters by the same door. He is a flabby, affable, easy-going English gentleman about fifty. He looks round cautiously to see that he is not followed, then closes the door softly and comes up to his wife.*

BULSOM-PORTER [*a quiet, drawling, good-humored utterance*]. It's a mystery to me, Henrietta, that we can't arrange to celebrate these little domestic battles on our own domestic hearth.

MRS. BUL.-P. I warn you that if you continue to pay such marked attention to that woman, I shall tell the whole neighborhood her history.

BUL.-P. You will please hold your tongue about Mrs. Dane. Jim says that he is mistaken, and that she is not the lady he knew in Vienna.

MRS. BUL.-P. He is only saying that to shelter her. The fact is, she is leading Jim by the nose, the same as she is leading you and young Carteret; and it only remains to be seen which of the three will be her victim.

BUL.-P. Well, I trust I shall be the lucky fellow, but I'm afraid the odds are on Lionel Carteret, and I shall come in a bad third.

MRS. BUL.-P. At least you might have the good taste to try and hide your infidelities!

BUL.-P. My dear, you may depend, when I have any, I shall. Now, suppose we get back to the others?

MRS. BUL.-P. You wish to get back to that woman?

BUL.-P. I wish to get back to Lady Eastney and the other guests.

MRS. BUL.-P. You admire this Mrs. Dane?

BUL.-P. [*cordially*]. Very much indeed.

MRS. BUL.-P. Why do you admire her?

BUL.-P. Because she has a pretty face, a soft voice, and a charming manner.

MRS. BUL.-P. Of course! Mere physical charms! What horribly disgusting minds men must have!

BUL.-P. We have! Give us up! Wash your hands of us, and let us go our own wicked ways! [*Going.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. To what extent do you admire her?

BUL.-P. To the extent of very much preferring her company to yours when you're in one of these unreasonable jealous fits. Now, will you oblige me by returning to the drawing-room?

[*He opens the drawing-room door. Enter by it* MR. JAMES RISBY, *an ordinary Englishman about thirty-five.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. I shall not speak to that woman —

BUL.-P. Hush!

[*Closes door sharply after* RISBY.]

RISBY. My dear aunt, I'm leaving for Paris to-morrow morning, and before I go I want to put you right on a little matter.

MRS. BUL.-P. You mean Mrs. Dane?

RISBY. Exactly. When I first saw her at Sir Daniel Carteret's a fortnight ago, I thought I recognized her—

MRS. BUL.-P. You did recognize her.

RISBY. I was mistaken.

MRS. BUL.-P. You told me she was the Miss Hindemarsh who was connected with a disgraceful scandal in Vienna five years ago. I particularly watched your manner, and I'm sure you were speaking the truth.

RISBY. I was speaking the truth—as I supposed. And therefore my manner carried conviction. But I am now speaking the truth when I tell you I was mistaken. I trust my manner carries equal conviction.

[*Looking at her very fixedly.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. [*looks at him very fixedly for a few moments.*] No, Jim; I do not and cannot believe you.

RISBY. I'm sorry. However, the fact remains, my dear aunt, that I have inadvertently injured a very charming woman—

MRS. BUL.-P. Of course! A very charming woman! That's the reason you withdraw your accusation.

RISBY. I made no accusation. And if you have repeated what I told you in the strictest confidence about Mrs. Dane, I must beg you to put the matter right at once. For if you give me as your authority I shall have to explain that I was mistaken, that consequently you were mistaken, and further, that from this moment, you are fully aware that you are mistaken.

MRS. BUL.-P. I'm not fully aware that I'm mistaken.

BUL.-P. What does it matter whether you're mistaken or no? Suppose Mrs. Dane is Miss Hindemarsh, what then?

MRS. BUL.-P. What then? Do you consider her fit to mix in the society of your wife?

BUL.-P. I daresay she's as fit as nine out of ten of the women you meet if the truth were only known. [*To* RISBY.] What was the exact story of this Miss Hindemarsh?

RISBY. Oh, the eternal trio!—Dramatis personæ, Mr. Horace Trent, charming, devoted, middle-aged husband; Mrs. Horace Trent, charming, devoted, middle-aged wife; Felicia Hindemarsh, charming, devoted, youthful governess to their children and companion to Mrs. Trent; the whole forming a truly happy family, who passed the autumn at the Italian lakes, and returned by Vienna at the time I was an *attaché* there five years ago. During their stay in Vienna, charming, middle-aged wife discovers a *liaison* between charming, middle-aged husband and charming, youthful governess; and instead of sensibly packing off missy with a month's salary and saying no more about it, charming, middle-aged wife, being a neurotic creature, commits suicide. Charming, middle-aged husband is naturally horrified, and also refrains from doing the sensible thing—in fact, goes out of his mind, and is at present in an asylum in the north of England. Missy does the sensible thing and disappears. The story is hushed up as far as possible, but the moral remains: "Upon the verge of such a tragedy may any one of us poor innocents be treading at this moment." [*Takes out watch.*] Adieu, auntie. I have to catch an early train to town to-morrow morning.

MRS. BUL.-P. You are sure Mrs. Dane is not Miss Hindemarsh?

RISBY. Quite sure.

[*The violin ceases and there is some applause.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. She doesn't resemble Miss Hindemarsh?

RISBY [*after a pause*]. There is a slight resemblance. Perhaps I should say a considerable resemblance.

MRS. BUL.-P. [*after looking at him fixedly for a moment*]. Jim, I shall fully inquire into this Mrs. Dane's antecedents—

BUL.-P. What for? What business is it of yours to rake up old scandals? It's five years ago, and—

RISBY. Sh—!

[*Enter* MRS. DANE, *a pretty, soft-voiced, dark little woman about twenty-eight. They show some embarrassment at her entrance. With some little hesitation* MRS. DANE *comes up to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.]

MRS. D. Lady Eastney has a great find in her new violinist, don't you think?

MRS. BUL.-P. [*coldly*]. Really, I didn't hear her. Ah, I see she is going to play again. Alfred [*to* BULSOM-PORTER] I very much want to hear this. [*Goes off, turning comes back a step.*] Alfred! Come and listen! I want to decide whether we shall engage this lady for our garden party.

[*She waits at door, till he comes up, then goes off.* BULSOM-PORTER *follows reluctantly, exchanging a little shrug and grin with* RISBY. *After they have gone off there is a little pause. The violin begins again and the buzz of conversation in the next room ceases.* RISBY *goes to door, left, closes it.* MRS. DANE *has been watching him a little furtively. Having closed the door he comes up to her.*]

RISBY. My dear Mrs. Dane, when one has inadvertently made a mistake, the best way is to own up at once.

MRS. D. Yes? Who has made a mistake?

RISBY. I have — a stupid, ill-natured, idiotic mistake. You remember when I first met you?

MRS. D. [*glances at him very quickly*]. At Sir Daniel Carteret's, a fortnight ago.

RISBY [*after a slight pause*]. Yes. Do you know I thought then that we had met before?

MRS. D. Indeed? Where?

RISBY. In Vienna five years ago.

MRS. D. I have never been in Vienna.

RISBY. No. The second time I saw you I was convinced I was mistaken. But in the meantime — I scarcely know how to confess my folly — I had thoughtlessly told my aunt, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, that I recognized you.

MRS. D. I've noticed that Mrs. Bulsom-Porter seems to avoid me. You must have told her I was some very wicked person. Whom does she suppose me to be?

RISBY. You have some resemblance to a Miss Felicia Hindemarsh —

MRS. D. Who is she?

RISBY. She was connected with an unfortunate affair in Vienna five years ago. [*Pause.*]

MRS. D. And does Mrs. Bulsom-Porter really think I am this — this Miss what's-her name?

RISBY. I have assured her you are not.

MRS. D. Thank you. What would you advise me to do?

RISBY. I am obliged to leave for Paris to-morrow morning on my way to Switzerland. If you find yourself in any difficulty, write to me and I will reply in such a way that there can be no doubt.

MRS. D. Thank you. You're very good.

RISBY. Not at all. I can't tell you how vexed I am to have made such a horrible mistake. But having made it, I thought it better to put you on your guard. Good-bye. [*Offering hand.*]

MRS. D. Good-bye.

[*He goes a few steps, then returns.*]

RISBY. Mrs. Dane, if you think of passing the winter away from Sunningwater, I have the most delightful little villa near Mentone — untenanted — I should be pleased to place it at your disposal.

MRS. D. No, thank you. Why should I leave Sunningwater?

RISBY. Is there anything I can do for you before I start?

MRS. D. Will you tell Sir Daniel and Mr. Carteret that I am not this lady?

RISBY [*after a moment or two's deliberation*]. Believe me, it will be better to let the matter drop entirely, unless it is raised by others. Lady Eastney is busy. I'll slip round by the conservatory and send her a little note of adieu. Again, good-bye.

MRS. D. Good-bye. I may always reckon you my friend?

[*Putting her hand out appealingly.*]

RISBY [*shakes her hand warmly*]. Rely on me.

[*Exit by conservatory. She watches him off; then in anxious deliberation walks up and down the room for a few moments.*]

[*Enter* LIONEL CARTERET, *a fresh, bright, enthusiastic, clear-complexioned English lad of twenty-four. He closes the door after him.*

LAL. Mrs. Dane, if I ask you a question will you answer me truthfully instead of telling me a polite fib?

MRS. D. [*after showing a little alarm*]. Ask me the question.

LAL. You seem to be keeping out of my way, trying not to give me a chance of speaking to you alone. [*She shows delight when she sees his drift.*] And the other night at our place you were so different; you seemed to like my company. Have I offended you?

MRS. D. No.

LAL. Then why have you changed? For you have changed.

MRS. D. Perhaps I was a little foolish last Wednesday.

LAL. No! no! You don't know what I felt that night! I waited outside your window till past midnight, then I tramped about the country till three, then the birds began to wake and sing and I whistled back their songs to them; then I went down to the river and had a swim; then I came back to the house and plundered the larder and ate up everything in it; then I went to the stables and saddled Moon Daisy, and galloped her all round the park; then I came back and had another breakfast, and then I kept just mad with happiness all the rest of the day!

MRS. D. [*she has listened with great delight, keeping her face away from him*]. I see I was very foolish.

LAL. No. Why?

MRS. D. Believe me, a friendship between us wouldn't be for your good.

LAL. It isn't friendship I want.

MRS. D. [*delighted*]. What else can it be? You're twenty-four. I'm twenty-seven. That means many years between us, and there will be more as we grow older.

LAL [*shaking his head*]. You will always be the same age that I am — the very same day, the very same hour.

MRS. D. [*she smiles and shakes her head*]. But you know nothing of me?

LAL. I know you as you know yourself.

MRS. D. [*a little cautiously*]. Do you? How?

LAL. My heart has told me all.

MRS. D. Perhaps your heart has spoken falsely.

LAL. You shan't persuade me that you aren't exactly what I want you to be.

MRS. D. [*shows great delight*]. Perhaps my best self isn't very far from that. But then we have so many different selves.

LAL. You have but your own self, and that is the one I know.

MRS. D. Then that is the particular self you must always believe me to be. It will do no harm when we are parted.

LAL. Parted?

MRS. D. Did you notice Sir Daniel looking at us down the table at dinner? He was thinking, "I must get Lionel away from Mrs. Dane." And he has made up his mind to do it.

LAL. He won't wish to part us when he knows how much I love you.

MRS. D. You haven't told him?

LAL. No. The truth is, a year ago I thought I was in love with Miss Colquhoun. But Lady Eastney and my father said she was too young.

MRS. D. So it was broken off?

LAL. We were to wait a year, and then if we were both of the same mind, we were to be formally engaged.

MRS. D. And is Miss Colquhoun of the same mind?

LAL. Janet? I don't know. I only know it would be a sin to be engaged to her while I love you as I do.

MRS. D. I'm afraid of Sir Daniel.

LAL. Why?

MRS. D. I suppose his reputation frightens me.

LAL. They say he's the pleasantest judge that ever hanged a man.

MRS. D. Mr. Risby was telling us

about some famous cross-examination — something about a forger.

LAL. Oh, Kettleby, the forger-murderer. On the morning of his execution Kettleby said that to have heard my father's cross-examination of his witnesses was very well worth being hanged for.

MRS. D. Then do you wonder I'm rather afraid of Sir Daniel?

LAL. You needn't be. In private he's the dearest, kindest-hearted man. And when he knows that the happiness of my whole life depends upon you, I'm sure he won't withhold his consent.

MRS. D. He isn't your own father?

LAL. No, but if he were I couldn't love him more than I do.

MRS. D. But if he doesn't think me suitable; if after consideration he says "No"?

LAL. Then I'll disobey him and marry you.

MRS. D. Are you sure of yourself?

LAL. Try me.

MRS. D. [*after some consideration*]. No. I'm very proud and happy to be loved as you love me. But I won't come between you and your father.

LAL. But if I can get his consent?

[*Enter* SIR DANIEL (MR. JUSTICE) CARTERET, *about fifty-five. A pause of embarrassment.* SIR DANIEL *is sauntering off at back.*]

MRS. D. We are missing all the music —

SIR D. It's worth hearing. Mademoiselle Lemonier is just going to play.

MRS. D. Thank you. I want to hear her —

[*Exit* MRS. DANE. LAL *is following her.*]

SIR D. Lal! [LAL *stops.* SIR DANIEL *closes the door*]. I've spoken to Sir Robert Jennings to take you out as assistant to him on this new Egyptian railway.

LAL. I'd rather not leave England just now, sir.

SIR D. [*very firmly*]. I wish it.

LAL. Why, sir?

SIR D. [*very affectionately putting his hand on* LAL'S *shoulder*]. My dear Lal, to stop you from making an unhappy fool of yourself.

LAL. In what way, sir?

SIR D. When I came up to London to read for the bar, I fell very desperately in love with my landlady's sister, a lady some six years older and some two stone heavier than myself. She was in the mantle business and wore a large crinoline. I used to call her my Bonnie Louisa. My father got wind of it, came up to town and promptly shattered our applecart; sent Bonnie Louisa flying to Paris, and packed me off on a judicial commission to India.

LAL. I don't see the point of the story, sir.

SIR D. Twelve years after, I happened to be coming down the Edgware Road on a Sunday morning, and I met Bonnie Louisa with a husband and five children, sailing along the pavement, all in their Sunday best.

LAL. Still, I don't see the point, sir.

SIR. D. I did! I hurried to church and devoutly thanked Heaven that my father had had the sense and the courage to do for me what I'm trying to do for you to-night. [*Very firmly.*] Now, my boy, you'll take this post under Sir Robert Jennings.

LAL. I can't leave her, sir. I love her so much.

SIR D. But a year ago you loved Janet Colquhoun.

LAL. I *thought* I loved Janet. I'm *sure* I love Mrs. Dane.

SIR D. And in a year you'll be sure you love somebody else, and you'll think you loved Mrs. Dane. [LAL *shakes his head.* SIR DANIEL *shakes his more vigorously still.*] Yes, yes. Bonnie Louisa, Janet Colquhoun, Juliet Capulet — the divine illusion is always the same — and it always ends unhappily.

LAL. It always ends unhappily?

SIR D. Or in bathos, which is far worse. Rather than that let us be thankful when the red-hot ploughshare is driven right through out hearts, or when we have the pluck to drive it through ourselves. Now Lal, I want you to leave England at once.

LAL. I'm very sorry. I can't, unless

— unless Mrs. Dane goes with me. [SIR DANIEL *looks astonished and indignant.*] I've asked her to be my wife.

SIR D. You might have told me first, Lal.

LAL. Forgive me, sir. I meant to, but my heart was so full and the words slipped out. You're angry with me?

SIR D. [*very kindly*]. No. [*Pause.*] Has she accepted you?

LAL. She will — if you consent.

SIR D. How long have you cared for her?

LAL. From the very first day I met her.

SIR D. Two months ago. Has she told you anything of her people?

LAL. No.

SIR D. Circumstances? position?

LAL. No.

SIR D. Where she has lived all her life?

LAL. She happened to say that she had spent some years in Canada.

SIR D. Canada? Come, that's something. There was a Mr. Dane — who was he?

LAL. I don't know.

SIR D. Hasn't she mentioned him?

LAL. Naturally not.

SIR D. Naturally not. Still there was a Mr. Dane, and he remains a factor in the situation. Has she told you her age?

LAL. Twenty-seven.

SIR D. Twenty-seven? Dear, dear, I should have said a year or so older.

LAL. She wouldn't tell me a lie.

SIR D. No?

LAL. A woman doesn't tell a lie to the man she loves. Why do you laugh?

SIR D. My dear Lal, fifty women out of a hundred have no notion of what truth means, and don't bother about it. The other fifty have the rudiments of a truth-sense in various stages of development, and will generally tell the truth where their own interests don't clash. But in matters of love, there isn't one woman in a hundred — there isn't one woman in a thousand, that, when she's put to it, won't lie right and left, up and down, backwards and forwards, *to* the man she loves, *for* the man she loves, *with* the man she loves, *about* the man she loves, to gain her ends, and *keep* the man she loves.

LAL. You have a very low opinion of women, sir.

SIR D. I have a very high opinion of them — in matters of strategy.

LAL. You won't stand in my way, sir? Think, sir, has there never been a time in your life when you would have thrown up everything, just for the right of calling one woman your own?

SIR D. [*is moved by his appeal; takes the hand he is holding out; shakes it warmly*]. I won't stand in your way, Lal.

LAL. Thank you, sir. You've always been better than a dozen fathers to me.

SIR D. I won't stand in your way — unless there's some good reason why you shouldn't marry her.

LAL. What reason can there be? You don't know anything against her?

SIR D. No. Still it's a little strange that she has lived in Sunningwater some months and nobody seems to know anything about her. Have you said anything to Janet?

LAL. No. I thought it better to let her guess — from my manner. You know, sir, there was no engagement between us.

SIR D. I'm sorry. I hope this business won't twist poor little Janet's heart-strings.

[*Enter* LADY EASTNEY, *about thirty, bright, fashionable, handsomely dressed.*]

LADY E. Sir Daniel! Playing truant here! Everybody will be putting the worst interpretation upon it.

SIR D. What interpretation?

LADY E. That I've accepted you at last, and that you've come in here to repent and think of the best way of getting out of it. [*Calls to* LAL.] Lionel! The young people are getting up a dance! Janet is posing against a pillar in an attitude of maiden-meditation fancy-free. Go and ask her to dance with you.

LAL [*confused*]. I'm very sorry,

Lady Eastney — will you tell her, sir? And will you tell Miss Colquhoun?

[*Exit hurriedly.* Lady Eastney *looks at* Sir Daniel *for an explanation.*]

Sir D. It seems that Lal didn't know his own mind last year.

Lady E. He's going to throw over my Janet for Mrs. Dane?

Sir D. I'm very sorry. I think you should tell Janet.

Lady E. Help me.

[*Enter* Janet Colquhoun, *about eighteen, with a slight Scotch accent; she saunters towards right.*]

Lady E. Aren't you going to dance, Janet?

Janet. I'm thinking I won't to-night.

Lady E. But what are all the young men doing? Hasn't anybody asked you?

Janet. Oh, I'm not standing out for want of partners, but I thought there were plenty of them in there to tumble over each other, so I'd just get a breath of cool air outside.

[*Going up to conservatory.* Lal Carteret *passes in conservatory and takes no notice of her. She flushes up, shows for a moment that she is very much hurt, then conquers her feelings, and with great effort controls herself during the remainder of the scene.*]

Lady E. Janet darling, go and have a dance, and don't think anything more about him.

Janet. Him?! Him?! Which him? [*Pointing off to where* Lionel Carteret *has just gone by. Very contemptuously*]. *That* him? Oh, there are plenty of other "hims" in the world, and I'll have a good conceit of myself and not trouble about any of them.

Lady E. [*very tenderly*]. Then you've forgotten all about your little flirtation a year ago?

Janet. Flirtation?

Lady E. With Mr. Carteret.

Janet. A year's a long time, isn't it? [*To* Sir Daniel.] I suppose Mr. Carteret has forgotten all about it too. Has he?

Sir D. I'm afraid Lal is very much like many other young men.

Janet. You mean he makes love to every girl he meets and then breaks his word to all of them?

Sir D. No! No! But perhaps he was a little too hasty a year ago.

Janet. Is there any harm done?

Sir D. Not unless you have taken it too seriously.

Janet. Didn't he wish me to take it seriously?

Sir D. He did at the time.

Janet. But now he doesn't?

Sir D. He's grieving to think that he has caused you pain.

Janet. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! Do call him in and tell him that I'll try and not break my heart over him. Mr. Carteret! [Lal *enters.*] Sir Daniel and Auntie have just reminded me that we were very foolish a year ago. I've seen so little of you lately that I'd forgotten all about it. Perhaps you've been grieving about it —

Lal. Janet!

Janet. Ah, you have! You won't take it too much to heart if I ask you not to think anything more of our — our flirtation? I was only seventeen. At seventeen one may change one's mind. I've changed my mind, Mr. Carteret.

Lal. If I've caused you any pain you'll forgive me?

Janet. Forgive you?! And I thought you'd be just breaking your heart for me! Aren't you breaking your heart?

Lal. Miss Colquhoun, I know I've behaved badly.

Janet [*mocking a Scotch peasant's dialect*]. Dinna fash yourself. Ye're a braw laddie, but I'll just mak up my mind to do without ye. [*A little contemptuous curtsey to him.*] Now! Will you dance with me just once for auld lang syne, and then I'll not trifle with your feelings any longer, Mr. Carteret?

Lal. If you wish.

[*Gives her his arm. Exeunt.*]

Lady E. I'm very angry with Lionel.

Sir D. Why?

Lady E. For not seeing where his happiness lies after I'd planned it out so carefully for him.

SIR D. Is there any knowing where married happiness lies for other people, or even for ourselves?

LADY E. Apparently not. The happiest marriage I've ever known was between my old governess of forty-six and a young piano-tuner of twenty-two. We all went down on our knees, and begged her to see the monstrous unsuitability of it, but she wouldn't! She would marry the man, and the result is she has lived happily ever afterwards!

SIR D. Give me your advice. Lal wants to marry this Mrs. Dane —

LADY E. I can't quite forgive her for taking him away from Janet, and I can't quite forgive Lionel.

SIR D. Don't be hard on him. Help me to do the best for the young fellow. I don't want him to make a mess of his life as I've done of mine.

LADY E. Have you made a mess of your life?

SIR D. Yes, so far as women are concerned.

LADY E. H'm. [*Looks at him very critically.*] You seem to have thrived very well on it. It can't have been a very unpleasant process. I wonder how many poor women have been sacrificed in the — scrimmage?

SIR D. None, I hope. At least — [*deep sigh*] I've had one great love story in my life. Shall I tell you about it?

LADY E. I should love to hear, if it isn't too sad and too sacred.

SIR D. I've never told this to anyone. I wouldn't tell it to you except — except that you know I would gladly give you the right to ask me for some knowledge of my past attachments.

LADY E. I have already the right to ask you, the right of friendship and the right of a woman's curiosity. [*Goes to door, looks off.*] I think I can leave them for five minutes, and I've really done my duty to them to-night. [*Closes door.*] Now, begin! Don't spare yourself. Don't shock me; at the same time don't spare yourself and skip nothing of vital interest.

SIR D. We'll skip the first thirty-five years of my life.

LADY E. Were they all barren of love stories?

SIR D. None of them, after fifteen. But what's a boy's love?

LADY E. That's what poor Janet is thinking.

SIR D. When I was just getting into comfortable practice I was thrown very much into the company of the wife of one of my clients. We grew to love each other deeply, passionately, almost before we were aware of it. We owned our love, recognized its hopelessness, and resolved to part. We parted, and endured some months of banishment worse than death; then we met again, and after a few mad weeks we determined to make our own happiness in our own world. She arranged to leave her home and to meet me at Liverpool by a certain train. I had our passages taken, and I remember waiting for her, waiting, waiting, waiting. She never came. I went back to town and found a letter from her. Her boy, her only child, was dangerously ill and she had stayed to nurse him. She was a deeply religious woman, though she loved me, and she had vowed to God that if her child's life was spared she would never see me again. I was heart-broken, but I sent her a message that she had done right. The boy's life was spared. I never saw her again. In a few months she was dead. I had a big bout or two of dissipation, then I pulled myself together and worked hammer and tongs, day and night, at my profession. I became successful, and met other women; had my affairs with them — I won't call them love-affairs — some of them graceful, some of them romantic, none of them quite degrading, but all of them empty and heartless. And so I frittered away what affections I had left in cheap and facile amours; and all the while her tender ghost was standing beside me, whispering, "This isn't love! This isn't love! You'll never love again as you loved me!" I've been successful and happy after a fashion; but there has never been a moment since I lost her when I wouldn't have cheerfully bartered every farthing, every honor, every tri-

umph I've scored in my profession, to stand again on that platform at Liverpool and know that she was coming to me.

LADY E. My poor friend!

SIR D. Her husband died, rather badly off, fifteen years ago. I took the boy, gave him my name, and made him my own. I've been a better man for having him, and I love him — I've never allowed Lal to see how much I love him — I don't think I quite know myself, but the young fellow is very dear to me, very, very dear.

LADY E. I should like to have been that woman. You've made me very jealous of her.

SIR D. Why?

LADY E. We all long to be the object of an undying love, and it so seldom comes off.

SIR D. Curious I should be telling you all this, and at the same time asking you to be my wife.

LADY E. My dear friend, I've never been so near accepting you as I am at this moment.

SIR D. Will you?

LADY E. Now, if you had that same love to offer me —

SIR D. I haven't, and I care for you too much to deceive you. But I can give you a very genuine attachment and, perfect fidelity. If I were to pretend to offer you more I should be wronging you. Well?

LADY E. Will you keep the offer open?

SIR D. As long as you please.

LADY E. You shouldn't say that. You should make me fear I'm going to lose you if I don't say "Yes" this moment.

SIR D. I'm past fifty. You're not thirty. There's no chance of you losing me. Well?

LADY E. Well, we'll let the matter stay over again, if you don't mind?

SIR D. I can wait. Meantime, you understand now why I want the boy to make a happy marriage. Will you help me?

LADY E. Yes, with all my heart. What have you done so far?

SIR D. Tried to laugh him out of it. When I found that was impossible I promised him he should marry her if we found she was suitable. What do you know of her?

LADY E. Nothing. I met her at the Canon's.

[*Enter very cautiously,* CANON BONSEY, *a rather jovial, good-natured clergyman about sixty, shrewd, plausible, worldly. He enters very cautiously, and closes the door behind him.*]

CANON B. Dear Lady Eastney, may I intrude for one moment? [*He comes up rather slowly and mysteriously.*] Do you know, I'm rather afraid we are going to have another scandal?

LADY E. [*quickly*]. I don't know anything about it, Canon. I won't know anything about it. And above all, I decline to give a certificate of injured innocence to any young person who misses her last train. Now [*inclining her ear to him*], gently breathe the name of the minx and her victim and do, please, keep me out of it this time.

CANON B. Dear Lady Eastney, you may rely I shall do my best to keep everybody out of it — especially myself. You haven't heard any whisper about one of your guests this evening?

LADY E. No — whom?

CANON B. Mrs. Dane.

[SIR DANIEL *and* LADY EASTNEY *exchange looks.*]

LADY E. What of her?

CANON B. Ask Mrs. Bulsom-Porter.

LADY E. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter! How is it that everything horrid in this neighborhood radiates to and from that woman! What is she saying, and how does she know?

CANON B. It seems her nephew, Mr. Risby, told her that Mrs. Dane was connected with a very ugly scandal in Vienna some years ago.

LADY E. Where is Mr. Risby? Will you ask him to come to me?

[*Enter* ADAMS, *with letter on tray which he brings to* LADY EASTNEY.]

ADAMS. From Mr. Risby, my lady. He has just gone.

[LADY EASTNEY *takes letter, reads it. Exit* ADAMS.]

SIR D. Canon, you introduced Mrs. Dane to us all.

CANON B. [*a little uncomfortable*]. Yes. She came to church. Of course I called on her. I found she played the piano divinely, and had been living in Winchester for some months, and knew some very nice people there whom I knew; and above all was a very delightful lady. And when a delightful lady comes to church, and subscribes regularly to all the parish charities, and has a perfect mastery of the piano, and is evidently a very dear sweet creature in every way, and a gentlewoman, I don't think it's the duty of a clergyman to ask her for references as if she were a housemaid, eh?

SIR D. [*to* LADY EASTNEY]. Does Risby mention anything of this?

LADY E. [*who has been reading* RISBY'S *letter*]. No. He only sends me a word of adieu. He has gone to town to-night on his way to Switzerland.

SIR D. [*to* CANON]. Then you have no knowledge of Mrs. Dane, whether she is a desirable acquaintance?

CANON B. A woman with such a face, and such a figure, and such a divine musician, cannot be an undesirable acquaintance. At the same time, as she is to take a stall at the bazaar, and the duchess is to open it, I should like to get this little matter cleared up. Our dear duchess is not a latitudinarian in these matters. What had we better do?

SIR D. You are the clergyman of the parish, and responsible for her introduction here. Oughtn't you to call on her and get to know her history?

CANON B. My dear Sir Daniel, what would happen? If there is anything shady in her past life she would omit to mention it. With my easy, ingenuous nature I should be a mere baby in her hands. No, I think this is a case where your legal experience might be of service, eh?

SIR D. If she were in the witness-box it might; but she isn't.

CANON B. Or, as it is essentially a woman's question, and as she is your guest, Lady Eastney, perhaps you might venture to gently — gently —

LADY E. Invite a lady to dinner, and then ask her whether she is fit to mix with my guests?

CANON B. H'm! It's very awkward. What is to be done?

[LAL *enters quickly. At the same moment* MRS. DANE *appears in conservatory, left, behind a shrub, and gently moves towards center, apparently much engaged with the plants.*]

LAL [*quick, indignant*]. Lady Eastney, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter is circulating a most malicious story about Mrs. Dane. I beg you to inquire into the matter. [*To* SIR DANIEL.] Sir, you will help us?

SIR D. [*in a hurried whisper*]. Not here, not now. We mustn't have a scene here. Hush!

[*Pointing to* MRS. DANE *in conservatory. She comes to center door, enters, and comes down to them.* CANON BONSEY *goes off very quietly at the window.*]

SIR D. [*looking off*]. Ah, Lal, there is Sir Robert. Now we can get a word with him about the railway.

LAL. But, sir —

SIR D. [*in a low tone, very peremptory, and taking* LAL'S *arm*]. If you please, Lal. If you please.

[*Takes* LAL *off.*]

LADY E. They are serving a little supper for the late guests. Won't you come and have some?

MRS. D. No, thank you. I'm a little faint. I'll stay here.

[LADY EASTNEY *goes to drawing-room door, looks back, returns to* MRS. DANE.]

LADY E. Is anything the matter?

MRS. D. No! No! What should there be?

LADY E. [*with meaning*]. Can I be of any service to you?

MRS. D. In what way? [*Pause — the two women look at each other.*] I'm only a little faint. Please don't wait.

LADY E. I'll send my maid to you.

Let me know if there is anything further I can do.

[*Exit,* MRS. DANE *watches her off furtively, then, after a second or two, rises, creeps round at back to behind the curtain hanging over door, peeps through, watching, listening, with drawn, frightened face. Laughter, buzz and hum of conversation, strains of distant dance music.*]

QUICK CURTAIN.

(*Nearly three weeks pass between Acts I. and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. Afternoon. Discover* JANET *seated on sofa at fancy work. She throws down the work, bursts into tears, then dries them, goes up to looking-glass on wall, stands looking at herself.*

JANET [*to herself in the glass*]. Ah, you poor coward! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? To be troubling about a man who has had the bad taste to throw you over? Have a better opinion of yourself, my poor Janet! There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it! And a better man than Lionel Carteret will come and take a fancy to your bonnie, bonnie face! So dry your eyes and bide a wee bit, my lassie.

[*Enter* LADY EASTNEY. *She comes up to* JANET *and looks in her face.*]

LADY E. Janet.

JANET [*faces her, picks up her work*]. Auntie, I'm just sick of staying in England, and wasting my life in such trumpery as this [*shaking her work ferociously*] so I'm going straight out to India!

LADY E. India?

JANET. The Indian women are fearfully demoralized and ignorant; they don't know how to treat their babies and when the poor wee mites come into the world they just perish by the score for the want of a sensible body to teach the mothers how to use them.

LADY E. My dear Janet, if Providence has neglected to endow the Indian women with the common instincts of maternity, I question if you're quite qualified to supply the deficiency.

JANET. Mrs. Patterson is organizing a mission to go out there to doctor and civilize the poor creatures, so I'll just go out and help her to do for them.

LADY E. Janet, I knew you were fretting—

JANET. What will I be fretting about?

LADY E. Lionel Carteret.

JANET [*bursts into laughter*]. Oh, my poor little Auntie [*kissing her*], I'd clean forgotten all about the man.

LADY E. Janet, tell me the truth—

JANET. The truth is, Auntie, that if Mr. Lionel Carteret were lying down there on the floor and begging me to pick him up, I wouldn't take the trouble to stoop down to him, or to any other man-body in the world! There!

[*Enter* ADAMS, *announcing* SIR DANIEL *and* MR. LIONEL CARTERET. *Enter* SIR DANIEL *and* LAL. *Exit* ADAMS.]

SIR D. [*to* JANET]. How-d'ye-do, dear?

JANET. How-d'ye-do, Sir Daniel? How-d'ye-do, Mr. Carteret?

LAL [*confused*]. How-d'ye-do?

[JANET *takes up her hat which is lying on the settee, goes off at back, swinging it with an affectation of carelessness.* LADY EASTNEY *has shaken hands with* SIR DANIEL *and* LAL.]

SIR D. Well, how do we stand now?

LADY E. The Bulsom-Porters are coming over to meet you, and I've asked the Canon to look in. They'll be here directly. [*Taking out watch.*]

SIR D. And then what are we to do?

LADY E. Talk it over.

SIR D. Don't you think there's been quite enough talking it over the last fortnight?

LADY E. We haven't had your assistance. Candidly, what is your opinion?

SIR D. I have none. I'm waiting for facts. Have you heard from Risby?

LADY E. Not a word.

SIR D. What did you say to him?

LADY E. I asked him to tell me in the strictest confidence all he knew about Mrs. Dane.

SIR D. And he hasn't replied?

LADY E. It's only five days ago that I wrote. Perhaps my letter hasn't reached him.

SIR D. Rather strange, isn't it?

LAL [*indignantly*]. It's much more strange that everybody should be saying and believing the worst of an innocent woman without a shadow of proof.

SIR D. Without a shadow of proof that she is innocent.

LAL. I thought, sir, that English law assumed everybody to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty.

SIR D. I do not assume Mrs. Dane is guilty — or innocent. I only say I don't know.

LAL. Mrs. Dane has done exactly what an innocent woman naturally would do.

SIR D. Ah, pardon my inexperience, my dear Lal. What does an innocent woman naturally do?

LAL. She treats all slander with silent contempt. She knows her life will stand the test of inquiry, and therefore she doesn't stoop to answer calumny.

SIR D. Meantime everybody cuts her.

LAL. Lady Eastney, if you were in Mrs. Dane's place how would you have acted?

SIR D. Supposing you were innocent?

LADY E. [*after a little pause*]. I think I should have acted exactly as Mrs. Dane has done.

SIR D. Supposing you were guilty?

LADY E. I don't know.

SIR D. If you were guilty don't you think you would try to act exactly in the same way? And whether you succeeded, would depend, not so much upon your guilt or your innocence, as upon your self-control, and how far you had cultivated the woman's gift for acting. Guilt is the natural and necessary mimic of innocence as hypocrisy is the natural and necessary mimic of virtue; and just as nature is always ready to lend a mimic-skin of protection to any beast or bird or insect that needs its shelter, so she is always ready to lend the sheep-skin of innocence to any criminal that's clever enough to draw it over him.

LAL. Criminal! You are speaking, sir, of the lady whom I have asked to be my wife.

SIR D. Not at all. I am speaking generally. For all I know, Mrs. Dane is the most innocent and virtuous lady in the world.

LAL. But you don't believe she is?

SIR D. I have no means of judging. The lady knows that her reputation is being torn to rags. She doesn't put the matter in her lawyer's hands. She avoids, or seems to avoid, meeting me; she gives you a few very vague details of her past life, and then wraps herself in a mantle of injured innocence —

LAL [*very indignantly*]. Injured innocence! [*To* SIR DANIEL.] I asked you for your help to clear the woman who is dearer to me than my life from a lying slander, and you insinuate that she is a criminal and a hypocrite! [*Seizes his hat.*] I will never again ask you for the smallest favor as long as I live. I give you back your name, and I take my own to offer it to her. Good-day, Sir Daniel Carteret. [*Going off.*]

LADY E. Lionel! [*He doesn't stop.*] Lionel! [*He half stops.*] Lionel! [*He stops.*] You want Mrs. Dane's reputation to be cleared. Don't you think Sir Daniel is the best man in England to help you? For her sake don't quarrel with him. Don't throw over the best of fathers and the best of friends in a moment of temper. Sir Daniel, I think you are a little hard on Mrs. Dane. Lionel doesn't want a legal machine to grind out the evidence. He wants a friend to stand by him and the woman he loves. Come, shake hands with him and promise you'll help him.

[*She joins their hands.*]

SIR D. Forgive me, my dear boy. I didn't mean to wound you.

LAL. Forgive me, sir. I can't bear that anyone should speak ill of her.

LADY E. And now let us put our heads together and set to work to do our best to clear her.

SIR D. Ah! How can we do that?

LAL. You soon cleared that poor gov-

erness who was accused of stealing the bracelet!

SIR D. Because she came to me and told me a plain, simple story which I was able to verify.

LADY E. I'll write a note to Mrs. Dane and ask her to step over; then I'll advise her to tell her story to you and put herself entirely in your hands.

SIR D. That may be very unkind to her.

LADY E. Why?

SIR D. For the past fortnight I have kept away from Mrs. Dane, I have tried to keep Lal away from her, because we have not a single fact to go upon. Risby, who is responsible for this story, doesn't answer your letter. Mrs. Dane herself keeps silence. Now suppose this story is true — [*Indignant gesture from* LAL.] My dear Lal, have patience! If it's false, we shall soon be able to demolish it and put Mrs. Dane right with the world. But suppose it's true, you force her hand, you make it impossible for her to hide it, and you give Mrs. Bulsom-Porter a public triumph over her. Don't you think it might be kinder to Mrs. Dane to wait?

LAL. No. Lady Eastney, will you write to Mrs. Dane and say that we all think she should stop these stories at once by coming over here and giving Sir Daniel the means of proving them false.

LADY E. [*seats herself at writing-table*]. After all, we only want to know the truth.

SIR D. You'll get it that way. [*To* LAL.] Lal, if I take this story to pieces and find it false, you shall marry Mrs. Dane as soon as you please.

LAL. Thank you, sir.

SIR D. But — don't be angry with me — if I find it true, of course there's an end to everything between you and her?

LAL. Of course, sir.

[*Enter* ADAMS, *announcing* CANON BONSEY. *Enter* CANON BONSEY. *He shakes hands with* SIR DANIEL *and* LAL. LADY EASTNEY *smiles and nods to* CANON *from writing-table.*]

LADY E. Adams, will you send this note to Mrs. Dane at once?

LAL. I'll take it myself, Lady Eastney. [LAL *takes letter and goes off, left. Exit* ADAMS, *left.*]

LADY E. [*shaking hands with* CANON]. I'm delighted you've come. Is there anything fresh?

CANON B. I met Bulsom-Porter this morning; he is most anxious to withdraw, or apologize, or do anything to smooth the matter over.

LADY E. I saw Mrs. Bulsom-Porter yesterday, and I'm quite sure she will never withdraw anything that can damage the reputation of another woman. It would be a concession to immorality.

SIR D. You've not seen Mrs. Dane again, I suppose, Canon?

CANON B. No. I called ten days ago and dropped a hint that under the circumstances it would be advisable for her not to take a stall at the bazaar.

SIR D. Did she take the hint?

CANON B. No; somehow or other she managed to convince me that she was a very much ill-used woman, and I left her with the understanding that she should take the stall, at the bazaar.

LADY E. Then she will?

CANON B. Well, this morning I understand our dear duchess has got wind of the story, and is going to send for me, and mercilessly haul me over the coals; in fact, I hear she refuses to open the bazaar unless Mrs. Dane retires; so between these two dear ladies my peace of mind is likely to be rudely shaken, if not rent in twain. Such is my reward for twenty-five years' management of this parish on the principle of the widest toleration for everybody's views in doctrine, and everybody's practices in morals.

LADY E. But you say Mrs. Dane convinced you that she was a very ill-used woman.

CANON B. She did. But then I was very willing to be convinced.

LADY E. Did you think her *manner* was that of an innocent woman?

CANON B. So far as I could judge. But, dear Lady Eastney, I am the veriest amateur in dealing with your sex; and so far as your *manner* goes I wouldn't presume to say that any one of you

could ever be guilty of anything. Eh, Sir Daniel?

Sir D. I never judge from manner alone. There is the confusion of guilt and the confusion of innocence; the brazen self-confidence of guilt and the serene self-confidence of innocence — I won't pretend I know which is which — except that sometimes a look, a gesture, a word, will give you a peep into the very soul of a man or woman, and you cry at once, "This is certain guilt," or "This is certain innocence."

Lady E. I wonder if we shall get such a peep to-day?

Canon B. How?

Lady E. I've just written to ask Mrs. Dane to come on here and meet Sir Daniel and you and Mrs. Bulsom-Porter.

[*Enter* Adams *announcing* Mr. *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. *Enter* Mr. *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. *Exit* Adams. *Hand-shakes and how-d'ye-do's exchanged between* Lady Eastney *and* Mr. *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter; Canon Bonsey *and* Mr. *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter; Sir Daniel, *and* Mr. *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter.]

Lady E. [*cordially to* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter]. Now this is very charming of you. We shall be able to talk this little matter over before Mrs. Dane comes.

Mrs. Bul.-P. I didn't understand that Mrs. Dane was to be present. [*Glancing sharply at* Bulsom-Porter.] Of course Mr. Bulsom-Porter is pleased. He sees nothing objectionable in his wife meeting her.

Bul.-P. My dear, if you consider Mrs. Dane's company objectionable, pray don't stay. I don't think I shall come to much harm, so I'll risk it.

[Mrs. Bulsom-Porter *looks very indignantly at* Bulsom-Porter.]

Lady E. [*hurriedly*]. Of course you know that Mrs. Dane denies this story?

Mrs. Bul.-P. Naturally she would. But I'm hourly expecting some very important information.

Lady E. About Mrs. Dane?

Mrs. Bul.-P. Yes. The messenger is now on his way from town, and I've directed him to be sent over from my house the moment he arrives, if you don't mind.

Lady E. Certainly not. We only wish to get at the truth.

Bul.-P. I've heard nothing about this messenger. Who is he?

Mrs. Bul.-P. That's my business for the present. I have taken this affair entirely into my own hands.

Bul.-P. The last time you took an affair into your own hands you involved me in a law-suit which cost me a thousand pounds.

Mrs. Bul.-P. The hussy was guilty, but she made eyes at the jury. Of course they were men. What could you expect? They gave her damages.

Bul.-P. So would I, if it hadn't been coming out of my own pocket.

Mrs. Bul.-P. On the whole the money was well spent. The matter was thoroughly ventilated, as I intend this shall be.

Lady E. But, my dear Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, you surely wish to find yourself mistaken in this story?

Mrs. Bul.-P. Of course I should be very pleased to find myself mistaken, but my instincts tell me that I'm not; and my instincts in these cases are invariably right.

Lady E. But have you nothing better than mere instincts to guide you?

Mrs. Bul.-P. Yes. There is a curious expression on Mrs. Dane's face which exactly corresponds with that of a Miss Spooner — [*glances sternly at* Bulsom-Porter.] I need not pursue the story.

Bul.-P. There was no story [*sighs deeply*], I regret to say.

Mrs. Bul.-P. [*very severely*]. You might have the good taste to leave your flippancies at home. If this woman is guilty, as I am convinced she is, I'm sure Canon Bonsey, as a clergyman, will own that I have rendered a very great service to Sunningwater Society in not allowing the matter to rest.

Canon B. Quite true. Whenever it is necessary that any disagreeable scandal should be stirred up for the good of Society, I'm very much obliged to those dear, good people who will kindly

stir it up for me, and save me the trouble. And with regard to the present case, I hope you'll ask Sir Daniel to give you the benefit of his vast legal experience, and then — then it won't be necessary to stir it up any further, will it?

LADY E. Sir Daniel will be only too pleased to give us his advice. Sir Daniel, why don't you come and help us?

SIR D. [*rising, coming forward*]. Help you talk it over? Will you please give me one single fact, one single scrap of evidence to go upon, and I'll then join the fray on one side or the other, as the case may be? Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, didn't I hear you say that you had a messenger now on his way from town with some important information? Who is he?

MRS. BUL.-P. I'd rather not say.

SIR D. Where does he get the information?

MRS. BUL.-P. He has been over to Vienna on purpose.

SIR D. That sounds hopeful. What means has he of getting at the truth?

MRS. BUL.-P. Every means.

SIR D. Better and better! Surely you might tell us who this omniscient person is?

MRS. BUL.-P. When I saw that my husband was determined to shelter this woman, and prevent the truth from coming to light, I sent up to town for Mr. Fendick, the private detective —

BUL.-P. [*startled*]. What!?

MRS. BUL.-P. And instructed him to make all inquiries, no matter at what expense.

BUL.-P. What?! Now please understand I entirely dissociate myself from your action.

MRS. BUL.-P. It's of no consequence. I can proceed alone. [*Enter* LAL.]

BUL.-P. But my dear Henrietta —

LAL. Mrs. Dane is here. Shall I ask her to come in?

LADY E. One moment, Lionel.

BUL.-P. [*to* LAL]. Will you please ask Mrs. Dane if she will spare me a few minutes? I have an explanation to make to her. [*Exit* LIONEL, *left.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. If you have any explanation to make to that lady you will please make it in my presence.

LADY E. Aren't we getting a little heated? I want to have a few words with Mrs. Dane alone — Ah! —

[*Enter* MRS. DANE. *She is dressed very simply, is very quiet and self-possessed, and is followed by* LIONEL, *who stands at door. She bows all round.* SIR DANIEL *and* BULSOM-PORTER *return her bow cordially.*]

MRS. D. I didn't quite understand your note, Lady Eastney, but you see I'm here.

LADY E. [*going to her, cordially shaking hands*]. I'm very glad you've come. I wanted a few minutes' talk with you. Won't you sit down? It's fearfully hot indoors. Suppose you all go down to the summer-house and I'll send you some cooling drinks, and come to you in a little while. Canon, will you see that Mrs. Bulsom-Porter is made comfortable?

CANON B. Delighted. [*To* MRS. DANE]. How-d'ye-do, my dear Mrs. Dane? [*Shaking hands.*] Then we'll wait you in the summer-house. [*Going to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] Allow me.

[SIR DANIEL *and* MRS. DANE *are watching each other furtively — he very searchingly, she quiet, self-possessed.* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *waits a moment to see that her husband does not speak to* MRS. DANE, *then goes off with the* CANON. *Exeunt* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *and* CANON.]

BUL.-P. [*confidentially to* SIR DANIEL, *who is quietly watching* MRS. DANE. *In a quiet voice*]. I say [*draws him aside*], how am I to stop my wife from dragging me into another confounded lawsuit?

SIR D. Ah! Come and talk it over.

[*Exeunt* SIR DANIEL *and* BULSOM-PORTER, SIR DANIEL *turning to glance slightly at* MRS. DANE *as he goes off.*]

LADY E. Lionel, will you find Adams and ask him to take tea and iced drinks to the summer-house?

[LAL *shakes hands with* LADY EASTNEY *in thankfulness for her consideration for* MRS. DANE *and goes off.*]

LADY E. Now my dear Mrs. Dane you know that I am your friend and Lionel's friend.

MRS. D. Yes.

LADY E. And between ourselves I hate Mrs. Bulsom-Porter with the most ungodly, unchristian hatred. I'm only waiting for some tolerable excuse to get everybody in Sunningwater to cut her. Lionel has told you what she says of you?

MRS. D. He says that she is spreading some story about my being a Miss Hindemarsh. What is the use of taking any notice of such a tale?

LADY E. You must take notice of it.

MRS. D. I have denied it.

LADY E. You must do more than that. Lionel is waiting to make you his wife—

MRS. D. If he doesn't believe me I do not wish to bind him. [*Triumphantly.*] But he does believe me.

LADY E. Yes, but Sir Daniel—

MRS. D. If Sir Daniel doesn't believe me what happiness can there be for me if I marry Mr. Carteret?

LADY E. Then you mean to give him up? Is that right? Is it wise? Is it kind to Lionel? Then there are your other friends; we are all waiting, to give this woman the lie and show her the door. If you don't defend yourself what are we to think?

MRS. D. You think I am an impostor.

LADY E. No. I said to Sir Daniel a few minutes ago that I should have acted throughout as you have done—

MRS. D. [*very gratefully*]. Thank you! Thank you!

LADY E. Up to the present moment. There is a point at which it is prudent to neglect slander—if it's false. There is a point at which it is imprudent, impossible to neglect slander—unless it is true. You have reached that point. This story is being repeated everywhere. Why won't you trust yourself to Sir Daniel?

MRS. D. What does Sir Daniel propose to do?

LADY E. To hear the story of your life, obtain the evidence for it, and then get Mrs. Bulsom-Porter to make you an ample apology.

MRS. D. [*cunningly*]. I suppose Sir Daniel has no doubt he would be able to prove my story?

LADY E. My dear Mrs. Dane, the cleverest lawyer of our generation! And he is only waiting one word from you to undertake your defence. If you refuse, what inference will everybody draw?

[*Enter* LAL *hastily.*]

LAL. Lady Eastney, what do you suppose Mrs. Bulsom-Porter has done? She has gone to Fendick, the private detective. [*A spasm of fright passes over* MRS. DANE'S *face, which is hidden from them.*] Did you know of it?

LADY E. She said she was expecting some information this afternoon. I've told Mrs. Dane that she must meet this slander.

[MRS. DANE *has recovered from her fright and regained her self-assurance. After a moment's deliberation she takes an opened telegram from her pocket and gives it to* LADY EASTNEY.]

MRS. D. [*very quietly*]. Read that, Lady Eastney.

LADY E. [*taking telegram*]. From whom?

MRS. D. From Mr. Risby.

LADY E. [*takes telegram from envelope—it is on two sheets; reads*]. "Lady Eastney writes me that Mrs. Bulsom-Porter repeats some absurd story about you. Am writing Lady Eastney this post that I was quite mistaken in recognizing you. If any further trouble, let me know and will immediately set matter right. James Risby, Schweizerhof, Lucerne." When did you get this?

MRS. D. Yesterday.

LADY E. But this explains everything. Why didn't you show it us at once?

[*Rings bell.*]

MRS. D. Why should I? You forget that you and all Sunningwater are very much concerned to know whether I'm this Miss Somebody. I have told you

that I'm not, and you don't believe me. Why should I trouble any further?

[*Enter* ADAMS.]

LADY E. Is the afternoon post in, Adams?

ADAMS. Not yet, my lady.

LADY E. Bring my letters to me the moment they arrive.

ADAMS. Yes, my lady. [*Exit.*]

LAL. The thing is quite clear. Risby has made a mistake. May I show that telegram to my father?

MRS. D. No. Let Mrs. Bulsom-Porter repeat her slanders, and pay her detectives to repeat them. I shall not take the least notice of her.

LADY E. You must! You owe it to Lionel to prove this story false. Let me show this telegram to Sir Daniel?

MRS. D. [*after a pause*]. Very well. As you please.

LADY E. We will very soon settle Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. [*Exit.*]

LAL [*lingering*]. My father has been asking for evidence. Now he has got it.

MRS. D. Yes. But suppose Sir Daniel cannot prove my innocence, suppose this story is still believed and we are parted after all, you will remember that I shall love you till my last breath, with all the love of my heart, with all that is best and truest in me?

LAL. Yes, but we shan't be parted. Come and tell my father everything.

MRS. D. That woman is here. I hate scenes of any kind.

LAL. Then I'll bring him to you.

[*She shows him a radiant, smiling face. He runs off. The moment he has gone she utters a sharp cry, followed by a long groan of despair, sits down on sofa with a white, drawn, haggard face, wringing her hands, staring in front of her.—A pause. The door opening into drawing-room, has been left open. Voices heard off.*]

ADAMS. What name did you say?

FENDICK. Fendick [*voice heard off*].

ADAMS. You say Mrs. Bulsom-Porter does expect you?

FENDICK. Yes. She left word at home was to come on here to her.

ADAMS. I'll let her know you're here.

[*Enter* ADAMS, *he crosses the room and goes off at window.* MRS. DANE *creeps up to door, looks through it, utters a little cry of alarm, and comes away. Enter* FENDICK, *an ordinary-looking, middle-class man about forty, clean shaven.*]

FENDICK. I beg pardon—[*Stops, seeing her.*] Oh!

MRS. D. Fendick! You, Fendick! You gave me some other name. Why did you come to my house a fortnight ago?

FENDICK. Well, you see, the fact is, I wanted to get a photograph of you in the way of business, and so I adopted the slight ruse of saying I was taking photographic views of the neighborhood, and I asked you to give me an opportunity of taking a view from your garden.

MRS. D. Did you get a photograph of me?

FENDICK. My partner took two whilst I was chatting with you and taking off your attention. [*She shows great fright.*] I know it was rather shabby, but my profession has its shabby side.

MRS. D. What use have you made of the photograph?

FENDICK. Well, of course that's my business. There! [*Looks all around.*] You treated me very well that day—if it's any use to you to know, I've been over to Vienna for Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, and after a good deal of trouble I found a man over there that remembers Miss Hindemarsh, and can recognize her if necessary. I mustn't say any more.

MRS. D. Yes! You're a detective. I'll employ you. Name your own sum. I'll give you double, treble, ten times what she gives. You'll find some one that knows that I'm not this Miss Hindemarsh—not the least like her?

FENDICK. No, ma'am, I can't. Thank you all the same.

MRS. D. [*getting more frantic*]. Yes! Yes! You must! I say you must! Don't ruin me! This man in Vienna? He doesn't know who and where I am now?

FENDICK. Not unless I bring him over.

MRS. D. But you won't! He won't recognize me. You've been to Vienna. Listen! Please understand from this time I employ you, and you shall be handsomely paid. There's nobody who recognizes me. I'm not in the least like that lady. You understand?

FENDICK. I can't do it. I can't, indeed. It might be found out.

MRS. D. It shan't be. How can it? Oh, how can I move you? I'll give you every farthing I have. Don't betray me! Don't betray me! It's everything to me — my happiness, my life, my all. Oh, don't ruin me! Hush! [*She looks off at window, points him off, whispering as he goes off.*] You won't betray me?

[*She comes back, with an immense effort regains her self-possession, takes a novel, and sits on sofa.*]

[*Enter* LAL, *followed by* ADAMS, *who crosses and goes off into drawing-room.*]

LAL. My father's coming. I made him promise to take up your case and fight it through.

MRS. D. How kind of him.

ADAMS. [*heard off.* MRS. DANE *listens, with great apprehension*]. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter will be here in a minute if you will wait.

[*Enter* SIR DANIEL *and* LADY EASTNEY.]

LADY E. Here is your champion. Tell him everything.

SIR D. If I can be of any service I shall be delighted.

[ADAMS *re-enters and brings letter on tray to* LADY EASTNEY. *She takes it, reads it. Exit* ADAMS, *closing the door after him.*]

MRS. D. [*to* SIR DANIEL]. When I heard this story was being circulated I thought it would be better to take no notice and let it die a natural death. Don't you think I was wise?

SIR D. Very wise, if it had died a natural death. But you see it hasn't. So suppose we set to work and crush the life out of it, shall we?

MRS. D. Shan't I be trespassing upon you? Won't it be wasting your valuable time?

SIR D. I've no hobby but my profession, so it won't be a waste of time to spend a few hours in my long vacation to free you from an unjust suspicion. [LAL *comes up to them.*] I said I had no hobby but my profession. That isn't true. This young fellow [*taking* LAL'S *arm affectionately*] is another very dear hobby of mine. You, too, are concerned for his happiness?

[*Watching her very closely.*]

MRS. D. Yes, indeed.

SIR D. [*watching her keenly*]. And therefore you wish me to sift this affair thoroughly? [*She is going to speak.*] Knowing that the happiness of his whole life is staked on the result?

MRS. D. I only wish for his happiness — not my own. Do just as you please.

SIR D. Then you place yourself entirely in my hands?

MRS. D. Yes; most willingly. How can I thank you?

SIR D. Wait till I deserve your thanks.

LADY E. [*has been reading the letter*]. Really the whole affair is too absurdly simple.

[*Enter* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *at window, followed by* BULSOM-PORTER *and* CANON BONSEY.]

MRS. BUL.-P. Lady Eastney, there's a man waiting to see me. Will you allow me?

LADY E. Certainly. I believe he is in the next room, but [*stopping her*] I think you should hear this letter first. It is from your nephew, Mr. Risby. "Dear Lady Eastney, I have received your letter. It is quite true that at the first glance I thought I recognized in Mrs. Dane a lady whom I had previously met, and I casually mentioned the fact to my aunt, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. But on seeing Mrs. Dane a second time, I discovered my mistake, and I told Mrs. Bulsom-Porter of my error. Will you express my sincere regrets to Mrs. Dane, and will you assure anyone who may revive the story that it is utterly false."

What more do we want? [*Hands the letter to* SIR DANIEL, *who reads it carefully.* LADY EASTNEY *then turns to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] Surely that is enough. And you will be only too glad to own to Mrs. Dane that you're mistaken.

MRS. BUL.-P. [*a little taken aback*]. I don't know. I should like to hear what Fendick has to say.

SIR D. [*suddenly, as if struck with an idea*]. One moment. Mrs. Dane has already placed herself in my hands. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, may I offer you my services?

MRS. BUL.-P. For what purpose?

SIR D. To get at the truth. You have circulated a story which from this letter seems to be quite false. Your husband has asked me to use my influence to prevent the very disagreeable consequences which are likely to follow. Will you allow me to call in Mr. Fendick and ask him a few questions?

MRS. BUL.-P. Well, I—

BUL.-P. Yes, if you please, Sir Daniel. I shall be guided entirely by you.

SIR D. Lady Eastney, you will permit me. [LADY EASTNEY *nods assent.* SIR DANIEL *goes to door, left, and calls.*] Mr. Fendick!

[FENDICK *enters.*]

SIR D. [*to* FENDICK]. You've been to Vienna lately?

FENDICK. Yes, sir.

SIR D. To ask certain questions about a lady who formerly lived there, a Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. Yes, sir.

SIR D. What are the results of your inquiries?

FENDICK. Well, sir, I'm not at liberty to say as you're not employing me.

SIR D. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter wishes you to speak.

MRS. BUL.-P. Will you please tell us what that you've found out in Vienna?

FENDICK. In respect of what, ma'am?

SIR D. Perhaps I'd better put a direct question. Is Miss Hindemarsh identical with a lady who is now living in this neighborhood?

FENDICK. This neighborhood?

SIR D. Is Miss Hindemarsh identical with a lady who is now in this room? [*Turning to* MRS. DANE.] Is this lady Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. No, sir.

SIR D. [*very searchingly*]. You're quite sure?

FENDICK. Quite sure, sir.

SIR D. You have trustworthy evidence that she is not Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. Yes, sir.

SIR D. What evidence have you?

FENDICK [*producing photograph*]. I took this portrait of Mrs. Dane over to Vienna [*giving photograph to* SIR DANIEL], and the parties over there that remember Miss Hindemarsh, say distinctly that this isn't the lady.

SIR D. She doesn't resemble Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. No, sir. Not in the least like her.

SIR D. Thank you. We shall want fuller information, but that will do for the present. [*Exit* FENDICK. *To* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] I'm afraid you've committed yourself very deeply. On Mrs. Dane's behalf I shall have to insist that you withdraw this story without the least reserve.

MRS. BUL.-P. In what way?

SIR D. May I suggest a form? If you will allow me I will draw it out and you can sign it before leaving the room.

[SIR DANIEL *sits down to write.*]

CANON B. [*coming up to* MRS. DANE]. I congratulate you. [*Shaking hands, looking round.*] I think we are all to be congratulated. You upon the pleasant termination to this very unpleasant affair; myself upon the restoration of peace to this idyllic neighborhood; and Mrs. Bulsom-Porter for having stirred up this matter so vigorously, and to an issue which, I am sure, must be as gratifying to her as it was evidently unexpected.

[*Smiling on* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.]

BUL.-P. I hope Mrs. Dane will allow me to offer her my sincere regrets.

[*To* MRS. DANE.]

MRS. D. Thank you. I was so sorry that I was not at home the other day when you called. You will forgive me for not answering your note?

MRS. BUL.-P. [*to* BULSOM-PORTER]. Your note? You've been making calls and leaving notes on —

BUL.-P. For heaven's sake keep your hysterics till you get home.

SIR D. [*having written, comes to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER]. Will you kindly read it over and sign it?

MRS. BUL.-P. [*glancing at note*]. But this is a public apology!

SIR D. I have made it as agreeable as I could.

MRS. BUL.-P. A public apology! [*Again looks at it.*] No. I'm quite sure from my nephew's manner that he was concealing something. I shall not apologize or withdraw anything until I've made further inquiries.

[*She is about to tear up the paper.*]

SIR D. [*stops her very quietly*]. Pardon me. Don't tear that. [*To* LADY EASTNEY.] Where is Mr. Risby now?

LADY E. At the Schweizerhof, Lucerne.

SIR D. To-day is Saturday. We can get him back next week. [*To* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] You have slandered an innocent lady without the least justification. Take that paper home, think the matter over, and — will you accept a piece of advice from an old lawyer — gratis — let me have it signed and witnessed by next Saturday. The alternative will be very troublesome, very humiliating to you, and terribly expensive — to your husband. [*Gesture of despair from* BULSOM-PORTER.] Take it home. Let me have it signed and witnessed by next Saturday.

MRS. D. How good of you!

[LADY EASTNEY *has rung the bell.* ADAMS *enters.*]

LADY E. The door, Adams.

[MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *much ruffled, rises and goes off giving* MRS. DANE *an indignant look as she passes.* MR. BULSOM-PORTER *follows his wife off.*

CURTAIN.

Four days pass between Acts II and III.

ACT III

SCENE. — *Library at* SIR DANIEL CARTERET'S, *Sunningwater. A cosy room in a modern Queen Anne red-brick house. At the back is a fire-place with a looking-glass in the overmantel. On the right a door leading into a passage. On the left windows opening upon a garden. A large flat-topped writing-table down stage on the right side. A sofa down stage left. Book-shelves all around the room.*

TIME. — *The following Wednesday afternoon. Discover* SIR DANIEL, *looking in the glass on bookcase* L., *arranging a flower in his button-hole, regarding himself critically.*

[*Enter* WILSON *announcing* LADY EASTNEY. *Enter* LADY EASTNEY. *Exit* WILSON.]

LADY E. [*shaking hands*]. You're busy?

SIR D. Yes; trying to persuade myself I am forty — solely on your account.

LADY E. That's not necessary. I like you well enough as you are.

SIR D. [*tenderly*]. Give me the best proof of that.

LADY E. I have. I'm here a quarter of an hour before my time.

SIR D. You couldn't be that in my house.

LADY E. How are matters going with Mrs. Dane?

SIR D. Splendidly. [*Going up to writing-table; taking up two sheets of foolscap, closely written over in a lady's hand.*] She has given me a detailed history of her whole life. She accounts for every moment from her childhood.

LADY E. Has Mr. Fendick sent his evidence?

SIR D. Yes, it came this morning. That's quite satisfactory too.

[*Taking up another paper from table.*]

LADY E. And Mr. Risby?

SIR D. He's coming specially from Lucerne to put matters right. I expect him almost every moment, and Fendick is also running down from town for a little

conference, so to-night I shall have all the threads of the case in my hands, and then —

LADY E. Then?

SIR D. Then I shall be able to talk to Mrs. Bulsom-Porter.

LADY E. I'm delighted. The whole neighborhood is still in a perfect fever over the affair. Nothing else is talked about.

SIR D. I wish there wasn't quite so much gossip about it.

LADY E. My dear Sir Daniel, we live in a residential neighborhood in a wicked world, and what possible occupation is there for us poor women except to discuss scandal, or — to create it? The duchess was there. She's going to make an important call on you this afternoon.

SIR D. Why?

LADY E. She's very much interested in Mrs. Dane's affair, and wants to know all about it. We shall find the duchess a useful ally.

SIR D. [*handling the foolscap*]. We shall need no ally, except the truth.

LADY E. [*smiling*]. Won't you? The truth is all very well, Sir Daniel, but if I had to live down a scandal, I'd rather have a duchess on my side.

[LAL *enters at window.*]

LAL. How d'ye do, Lady Eastney?

LADY E. How d'ye do?

[*Shaking hands.*]

LAL. Risby hasn't turned up yet?

SIR D. [*taking out watch*]. No, I expect him very soon. You haven't brought Mrs. Dane?

LAL. No. She has thought of some more particulars of her history, and is writing them out for you.

SIR D. Go back and tell her not to trouble any further, and ask her to be here to meet Risby in [*taking out watch*] ten minutes.

LAL. All right. Lady Eastney, I can't thank you enough.

LADY E. What for?

LAL. For helping us to beat down these horrible lies.

LADY E. My dear Lal, I feel very strongly about it, and I shan't rest till I've worked the whole neighborhood into a frenzy of virtuous sympathy for Mrs. Dane, and a frenzy of virtuous indignation against Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. Give my love to Mrs. Dane, and tell her that, will you?

LAL. God bless you! Then I'll go and fetch Lucy, sir?

SIR D. [*has been studying* MRS. DANE'S *foolscap paper*]. Yes. Bring her at once.

[*Exit* LAL *at window with a bright look of gratitude to* LADY EASTNEY.]

LADY E. You're quite reconciled to their engagement?

SIR D. Yes. I find I'm beginning to like her very much. I think the boy will be happy with her!

LADY E. You seem to take a greater interest in Lionel's love-affairs than you do in your own.

SIR D. Ah no! You shouldn't say that. But you have discouraged me so often —

LADY E. I, discouraged you? Why, I've encouraged you to propose to me I don't know how many times.

SIR D. Give me a little encouragement now.

LADY E. I am a woman. I am twenty-eight. My first essay in marriage was not a conspicuous success. On the other hand, it was not a disastrous failure. Altogether I'm quite willing to make a fresh experiment. But, on the other hand, I'm quite happy in my present state. It has very great advantages. I shall need a very great deal of wooing before I am induced to change it. Indeed, on second thoughts why should I change it at all?

SIR D. I wouldn't have you change it, except for a happier one.

LADY E. I won't, if I can help it. But there's the rub. I like you very much, but, honestly, I don't love you. At least [*looking him up and down critically*] I don't think I do. But there again, I'm open to persuasion.

SIR D. Give me the benefit of the doubt.

LADY E. I will — and say "No."

SIR D. "No?!"

LADY E. If I say "Yes" how can I be sure that Mr. Somebody else won't come

along and make me sorry all my life that I didn't say "No"?

SIR D. Is Mr. Somebody else likely to come?

LADY E. How can I tell? He's always hanging about just round the corner, and if I married you, and you neglected me, or were unkind, I'm sure he'd turn up, and I do believe I should listen to the wretch, and then—heigho!

SIR D. Be my wife and if Mr. Somebody else ever wins a word, or a look, or a thought from you, I'll own it's my fault and I'll forgive him and you too.

LADY E. [*looks up at him*]. You know I shall end by accepting you.

SIR D. I'm sure you will.

LADY E. Then I'm sure I won't. At least not until—

SIR D. Not until when?

LADY E. Not until I've made up my mind. I want to be persuaded, I want to be wooed. I want you to see in me a thousand more perfections than ever a woman had, and value me a thousand times more than ever a woman was valued.

SIR D. I couldn't value you more than I do.

LADY E. [*shakes her head and smiles*]. It won't do! It won't do! With every wish in the world to oblige you, I really cannot sell my liberty at your present quotations.

[*Enter* WILSON *announcing* MISS COLQUHOUN. *Enter* JANET. *Exit* WILSON.]

JANET. How d'ye do, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. [*shakes hands*]. How are you, dear?

JANET. Auntie, Mrs. Patterson has just come over to see you about her mission to the Indian women. Can you spare her just a few minutes?

LADY E. A few minutes? My dear child, Mrs. Patterson is a woman with a mission, and it takes years to persuade people out of that folly.

[*Enter* LAL *at window.*]

LAL. I've brought Lucy, sir. She's here—

[*Stops, seeing* JANET.]

JANET. Auntie, you will let Mrs. Patterson take me away from England?

LADY E. I'll come and talk it over with her, dear. [*Puts* JANET *off at door, which has been left open. To* SIR DANIEL.] I'll come back by-and-by to see how everything goes with Mrs. Dane.

[*Exit* LADY EASTNEY. *He closes the door after her, and goes up to writing-table, takes up* MRS. DANE'S *and* FENDICK'S *notes. Enter* MRS. DANE *and* LAL *at window. She has a large blue envelope in her hand, partly written over.*]

MRS. D. How d'ye do, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. [*shaking hands very cordially*]. How d'ye do?

MRS. D. Have you read my statement?

SIR D. Every word. I congratulate you.

MRS. D. On what?

SIR D. On having told a perfectly plain, straightforward story, in a perfectly plain straightforward way.

MRS. D. I only put down what I knew and felt, just as it came to me. I've jotted down a few more notes.

[*Taking out of the envelope another sheet of foolscap, which is partly written over.*]

SIR D. [*taking sheet*]. You've already given me all I want.

MRS. D. Tell me what else I can do?

SIR D. [*takes her hands, very quietly and tenderly*]. Leave yourself in my hands, and await the result with perfect confidence.

[*Enter* WILSON, *announcing* MR. RISBY. *Enter* RISBY. *Exit* WILSON.]

MRS. D. [*rather quickly and eagerly*]. Oh, Mr. Risby, how d'ye do?

[RISBY *is a little taken aback; she gives him a significant glance and he returns her greeting very cordially.*]

RISBY. Ah, my dear Mrs. Dane! [*Shakes hands very cordially with her, then goes to* SIR DANIEL.] Sir Daniel!

[*Shakes hands with* SIR DANIEL.]

SIR D. How are you?

RISBY. Lionel!

[*Shaking hands with* LIONEL.]

LAL. How d'ye do?

RISBY [*to* SIR DANIEL]. You got my ire?

SIR D. Yes, I'm really sorry to drag ou half across Europe —

RISBY. Half across Europe? Mrs. ane may be quite sure that I would illingly be dragged half across the celes- al spaces if I can only repair my ab- rd mistake. [*Glancing at* LIONEL.] I ppose I may speak quite freely—

SIR D. Oh, yes. Lionel is to marry rs. Dane when we have cleared this).

RISBY. Indeed! [*Goes to* LAL.] My ngratulations — and to Mrs. Dane. nat makes it all the more necessary at I should put matters right. Now ll me what can I do?

SIR D. You told Mrs. Bulsom-Porter at Mrs. Dane was in reality Miss Fe- ia Hindemarsh?

RISBY. Yes. I was misled by a cer- in general resemblance on seeing Mrs. ane at some distance. When I got ite close to her I saw that I had made horrible blunder.

SIR D. Of course you withdraw the tement?

RISBY. Utterly and entirely, with a ousand apologies.

SIR D. And suppose we have to bring e matter into court?

[MRS. DANE *watches* RISBY *anxiously*.]

RISBY. Will that be necessary?

SIR D. I hope not. I think not. But must be prepared. We should need ur evidence.

RISBY. Of course — if I'm in England. t I expect to make a very extended ir, and might be absent for a year or o.

SIR D. Then we must take your evi- nce before you start.

RISBY. Certainly. But you'll keep it of court, won't you?

SIR D. I shall do my best. But we ll want you to say that this lady is Felicia Hindemarsh, whom you knew Vienna.

RISBY. By all means. But before I ve Sunningwater I'll go over to auntie and try again to drive that fact into her comprehension.

SIR D. That might help us.

RISBY. I'll go at once.

[*Takes up his hat.*]

[*Enter* WILSON.]

WILSON. Her Grace has called, Sir Daniel. I've shown her into the drawing-room.

SIR D. Very well, Wilson. Tell her Grace I'll be there in a moment.

[*Exit* WILSON.]

RISBY. Is there anything further that you wish to know?

SIR D. I think not. When do you leave England?

RISBY. In a day or two — as soon as I can get away.

SIR D. I've given Mrs. Bulsom-Porter till Saturday to choose between a lawsuit and an apology. Can you stay till after then?

RISBY. Certainly. I'll hold myself at your disposal till Monday night. The Senior Varsity will find me till then.

SIR D. Very well.

RISBY. Good-bye, if all goes well and I don't see you again.

SIR D. Good-bye. [*Shakes hands with* RISBY — *turns to* MRS. DANE.] You'll wait here, won't you? I expect Fendick every moment. I must go and get rid of this bothering old woman —

MRS. D. I understand she has come to make inquiries about me?

SIR D. Yes, I believe. I shall be able to set her mind at rest. [*Exit, right.*]

MRS. D. [*To* RISBY]. It was so good of you to come and help us —

RISBY. Surely I could do no less.

MRS. D. Thank you so much. [*Suddenly.*] Lionel —

LAL. Yes?

MRS. D. I've left my keys in my escritoire. And it's open. There are some letters of yours — I wouldn't like them to be read. Would you mind running across and locking it, and bringing me the keys?

LAL. Yes, if you wish. I shall see you again, Risby?

RISBY. Yes, I daresay.

[*Exit* LIONEL *at window. They both watch him off. She then turns to*

RISBY *in a burst of gratitude, wrings his hands.*]

MRS. D. Thank you, with all my heart!

RISBY. Hush! Take care!

[*Looks round warningly.*]

MRS. D. Sir Daniel seems to be quite satisfied—

RISBY. Yes, I think I've pulled you through so far, but I've gone as far as it's safe to go—perhaps farther, but [*very emphatically*] whatever you do, you must keep Sir Daniel from bringing it into court.

MRS. D. You think everything would come out?

RISBY. I fear so. This history of your life that you've given to Sir Daniel?

MRS. D. Yes?

RISBY. He has read it?

MRS. D. Yes, and he's quite satisfied. He says it's perfectly plain and straightforward. Naturally it would be, as I knew Lucy's life almost as well as I know my own.

RISBY. And she was really Mrs. Dane?

MRS. D. Yes; when she died I took her name and became her.

RISBY. And you think you can carry it out to the end?

MRS. D. Yes; I think I can now I've begun. I must! I must! Why do you look at me like that? You think I'm a horrid creature—you despise me?

RISBY. No, no—

MRS. D. Yes, you do, I can see you do! Don't you think I despise myself? Do you think I'd do all this, if I could help myself, if there were any other way out of it? But I don't want you to despise me—

RISBY. Believe me, I am only sorry, deeply sorry for you. May I say one word—Lionel?

MRS. D. Well?

RISBY. Don't you think it would be better to tell him—safer?

MRS. D. I can't now. He loves me and believes in me.

RISBY. Good-bye. [*Offers hand.*]

MRS. D. [*Again seizes his hand—wrings it with gratitude*]. Thanks! Thanks! This has shown me how good and true a friend a man can be to a woman!

RISBY [*retaining her hand*]. I've been awfully puzzled what to do. When I called on you this morning I came to tell you to face the worst, that it would be impossible for me to hide the truth from Sir Daniel—

MRS. D. But you did!

RISBY. Yes. I'm not a very soft-hearted chap, but when I saw that tear, I felt I couldn't round on you. I hope I've played the game fairly.

MRS. D. Fairly? Most generously, to me.

RISBY. And I hope not unfairly to Lionel.

MRS. D. I'll make him the best and truest wife that ever lived. You believe that?

RISBY. Yes, I believe you will. Good-bye. [*Kisses her hand, drops it, looks at her.*] After all, it isn't always the good women who are the best for us rascals.

[*Enter* WILSON, *showing in* FENDICK. MRS. DANE *shows very slight confusion, and a look is exchanged between her and* FENDICK, *which* RISBY *notices.*]

WILSON. Sir Daniel is engaged for a minute, but he told me to tell you to wait.

FENDICK. All right. "No hurry," tell Sir Daniel. [*Exit* WILSON.]

RISBY. Good-bye.

[*She shakes his hand warmly. Exit* RISBY.]

MRS. D. Good morning.

FENDICK. Good morning.

MRS. D. Anything new since I saw you last night?

FENDICK. No. You're sure you can pull this cousin business off? Got all your dates and facts at your finger's ends?

MRS. D. Yes. We lived together all our lives except when I was a governess.

FENDICK. That's the time as you've got to be careful about. As I told you last night, I rummaged about pretty well amongst the yokels at Tawhampton, and so far as I can gather I don't think

there's the requisite intelligence in Tawhampton to say that you aren't Lucy Allen. Especially as there was a likeness between you and your cousin.

MRS. D. Yes; we were the same height, and the same complexion.

FENDICK. Then you went as pupil teacher to Eastbourne?

MRS. D. Yes.

FENDICK. Ware off Eastbourne. The old dowager at the school would spot you at once. And I've got to mind my p's and q's about the concierge at Vienna —

MRS. D. But you say there isn't a concierge.

FENDICK. I fancy I can lay my hands on an old Italian friend, who'll pass at a pinch. But I tell you this, if I get out of this business with clean boots I'll take good care I don't land myself in a dirty mess like this a second time.

MRS. D. I'm sorry you should call it that. You know that I'm quite willing you should make any charge —

FENDICK. It isn't the money. If I'd known what I was letting myself in for I wouldn't have done it for a thousand pounds. But you worked on my feelings, so that before I knew what I was saying I'd said you weren't the woman, and being a bit short-sighted I didn't recognize Sir Daniel in his private get-up. Hush!

[*They compose themselves.*]

[SIR DANIEL *enters.*]

SIR D. Ah, Mr. Fendick, how d'ye do?

[*Goes up to writing-table and takes up* FENDICK'S *notes.*]

FENDICK. How d'ye do, Sir Daniel? I wasn't aware when I met you at Lady Eastney's the other day that I had the pleasure and honour of addressing the famous judge, Sir Daniel Carteret?

SIR D. No, Mr. Fendick? There I had the advantage of you, for I was aware I was addressing Mr. Fendick, the famous detective.

FENDICK. Well, our professions are, in manner of speaking, somewhat similar, aren't they?

SIR D. Not similar, Mr. Fendick. Say co-operative, mutually assistant and necessary to each other. You elicit the truth, I deal with it — when I get it. You catch the hare — I cook him.

FENDICK. Him or her as the case may be.

SIR D. Him or her as the case may be. Well, I don't think it will take long to hunt this hare down, eh?

FENDICK. No, Sir Daniel, I think not. You received my copy of the evidence I obtained in Vienna?

SIR D. [*handing* FENDICK'S *notes*]. Yes, it came this morning. It seems very satisfactory.

FENDICK. Most satisfactory, I thought, Sir Daniel.

SIR D. You rely chiefly upon the evidence of this concierge I see. He is perfectly clear in his remembrance of Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. Perfectly clear.

SIR D. [*taking up a photograph*]. And from this photograph of Mrs. Dane that you gave me the other day, which, by the way, is a very good one —

FENDICK. Taken by my partner, Burton.

SIR D. The concierge is prepared to swear that Mrs. Dane is not Miss Hindemarsh?

FENDICK. Yes, Sir Daniel.

SIR D. Have you sent Mrs. Bulsom-Porter a copy of this evidence?

FENDICK. No, Sir Daniel. When I called on her the other day, after seeing you at Lady Eastney's, she rowed me like a pickpocket —

SIR D. What for?

FENDICK. She said she'd sent me to Vienna to procure evidence of Mrs. Dane's guilt, instead of which I'd gone and proved her innocent, with other remarks quite *infra dig.* to me and my character.

SIR D. The woman must be mad!

FENDICK. That's what I say — mad on the rampage for social purity.

SIR D. I'll see Mr. Bulsom-Porter and explain to him how the matter stands.

FENDICK. Then I may consider the job concluded as far as I am concerned?

SIR D. Yes, I think so. We know where to find you.

FENDICK. Fifty-four Buckingham

Street. Telegraphic address, Sharpshot, London. Good-day to you, Sir Daniel. Good-day to you, ma'am. Glad this little affair has ended so pleasantly for all parties.

Mrs. D. Good-day, Mr. Fendick. Thank you for the trouble you have taken.

Fendick. Don't name it, ma'am. I congratulate you heartily, I assure you. [*Exit.*]

Sir D. You must let me congratulate you too.

Mrs. D. You think it is all ended? I'm free from this scandal at last?

Sir D. Yes. I have something to say to you.

Mrs. D. Yes?

Sir D. Now that we may consider it over, I don't mind owning that at first I thought Mrs. Bulsom-Porter's tale was true.

Mrs. D. But you don't now?! You believe in me? You think that I am worthy of Lionel?

Sir D. Yes, and it gives me the greatest pleasure, my dear Lucy, to welcome you into my family as my daughter.

[*He kisses her forehead. She bursts into a little fit of tears.*]

Mrs. D. Oh! I can't help it! Don't look at me please.

Sir D. Cry away! Cry away! I'll go into the next room and send a little note to Bulsom-Porter. Between us I daresay we can put it all straight. [*Exit.*]

Mrs. D. [*Left alone, she clasps her hands in gratitude and breathes out*]. I thank Thee! I thank Thee! All my life shall show my gratitude!

[*She continues sobbing. After some moments* Sir Daniel *re-enters with an open sheet of note-paper on which he has begun to write a letter.*]

Sir D. By the way, my dear Lucy, I've been thinking—

[*She turns around and he sees she is still crying.*]

Mrs. D. Isn't it foolish of me? This horrible thing has been hanging over me for weeks, and the relief seems too great. There! It's all over now! [*Looks up at him radiantly.*] Yes—you've been thinking—what?

Sir D. I've been thinking what you should do. Tawhampton is only six hours by rail—

Mrs. D. Well?

Sir D. You lived there you say till you were fifteen?

Mrs. D. Yes, and then my father and mother took me to Canada.

Sir D. You had no other home in your childhood?

Mrs. D. No.

Sir D. Have you been there since your return to England?

Mrs. D. No. It's an out-of-the-way place, and I've had no occasion to go.

Sir D. Some of your childhood friends must be living there still?

Mrs. D. Yes, I daresay.

Sir D. You shall go down there tomorrow and hunt up some of your old friends who remember you as Lucy Allen.

Mrs. D. Yes, that's a splendid idea. I hadn't thought of that. [*Cunningly.*] But suppose I'm not able to find anybody at Tawhampton who can positively identify me, you have still sufficient evidence to prove who I am?

Sir D. I have no evidence whatever to prove who you are. I have Risby and Fendick's evidence to prove that you are not Felicia Hindemarsh.

Mrs. D. Isn't that enough?

Sir D. Not if the matter comes into court. We shall then need evidence to prove that you are Lucy Dane *née* Allen, with a history that can be traced.

Mrs. D. I see. This doesn't mean that I'm to be dragged all through the horrible scandal again?

Sir D. No. I think not. Bulsom-Porter is sure to meet the matter with an apology. Still, I think you should go to Tawhampton.

Mrs. D. I'm quite willing.

Sir D. Did you keep up any correspondence with anyone there after you left?

Mrs. D. Yes, for a little while, but soon ceased.

Sir D. Whom did you write to?

Mrs. D. Mrs. Garton was one—

SIR D. You don't know if she is living there still?

MRS. D. No. She was over sixty then —

SIR D. Do you remember anybody else? [*No reply.*] I have a topographical dictionary somewhere. [*Looking along bookshelves.*] That might help us, if I can put my hands on it [*going along the bookshelves; she watches him furtively and with great anxiety.*] It used to be somewhere on these shelves. I wonder what has become of it. Who was the parson of the place?

MRS. D. There were several curates. Mr. Inskip; he was a very stout little man with spectacles; he would remember me, and Mr. Charlesworth —

SIR D. Have you any idea where either of them is to be found?

MRS. D. No.

SIR D. Who taught you? Did you go to school?

MRS. D. No. We had governesses.

SIR D. "We?" You say you were an only child. Who's "we?"

MRS. D. My cousin and I.

SIR D. Your cousin? [*Turns over the foolscap sheets.*] Your cousin? A girl?

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. [*running hastily over the sheets*]. You haven't mentioned her. Where is she now?

MRS. D. I don't know. She left Tawhampton before I did.

SIR D. Where did she go?

MRS. D. She took a situation as governess, I think.

SIR D. Did she live with you in Tawhampton?

MRS. D. No. Her father lived in the village, and she used to come to our house to be taught.

SIR D. [*running over the notes*]. You haven't mentioned her father?

MRS. D. No. I didn't see what he had to do with my story. He died before I left the village.

SIR D. What was your cousin's name?

MRS. D. [*after a slight pause*]. Annie.

SIR D. Annie what?

MRS. D. Annie Allen.

SIR D. And you have completely lost sight of her?

MRS. D. Yes. Are there any other questions you wish to ask me?

SIR D. No. I think not.

MRS. D. Then I'll go back home and rest. My head is ready to split. Thank you for believing in me. You know Lionel will be happy with me?

SIR D. I feel sure he will. [*Going with her to the window. As he comes up to the book-case his eye lights on volumes of the topographical dictionary.*] Ah! Here's the very thing.

MRS. D. What?

SIR D. [*taking a volume out of the shelf*]. Topographical dictionary of England and Wales. [*Looking along the volumes.*] Volume one, Devonshire. Let's see what it has to say about Tawhampton. [*Taking the volume to table and turning over the leaves — she watches him with great anxiety.*] Devonshire — Devonshire — Tawhampton — [*Reading from the book.*] Tawhampton is a parish and village — picturesquely situated — mid-division of the country — Wonford hundred — rural deanery of Crockenwell — Archdeaconry of Okestock. The church of Saint Andrew is a building in the Perpendicular style. The living is a vicarage, net yearly value £376, and has been held since eighteen-seventy-five by [*turns round on her, she shows great fright*] by the Reverend Francis Hindemarsh! Hindemarsh?

MRS. D. He was my uncle.

SIR D. Your uncle?

MRS. D. Sir Daniel, I've done wrong, very wrong to hide from you that Felicia Hindemarsh was my cousin.

SIR D. Felicia Hindemarsh was your cousin!

MRS. D. Can't you understand why I have hidden it? The whole affair was so terrible! I can't tell you how keenly I felt the disgrace, how keenly I feel it still.

SIR D. But she was only your cousin. Surely there was no reason for you to hide it from Lionel and me.

MRS. D. I didn't intend to hide it from you. But I had always concealed it from everybody. And having once begun I was obliged to go on. Can't you understand?

[*He doesn't reply. His face shows very grave concern, and he again walks up and down as if in perplexity as to what course he should take.*]

MRS. D. [*after a considerable pause*]. You're angry with me?

SIR D. Not angry. But grieved, deeply grieved that you hadn't the courage to tell me the truth.

MRS. D. I will now — the whole truth — indeed, I will.

SIR D. [*drily*]. Yes. Perhaps it would be advisable.

[*He is still evidently distressed and annoyed; at length goes up to writing-table, takes up the foolscap sheets, glances through them.*]

SIR D. Of course this puts the matter in a new light.

MRS. D. How? I'll tell Lionel. Promise me it sha'n't part us!

SIR D. There is no reason you should be parted because you happen to be the cousin of Felicia Hindemarsh. But —

MRS. D. But what?

SIR D. Why didn't you deal openly with us? See how Lionel loves you! How he believes in you! And I too had grown to like you. I felt glad that you were going to be my daughter. Ah, why didn't you trust us?

MRS. D. Oh, I've done wrong, very wrong! Say that it sha'n't part us. You forgive me?

SIR D. [*after a pause offers his hand which she takes eagerly*]. I forgive you. But you wish me to clear you thoroughly from this slander?

MRS. D. Yes, indeed. And you will?

SIR D. Yes. But understand, my dear Lucy, from this moment there must not be the faintest suspicion of trifling with the truth. Understand that most clearly.

MRS. D. I do.

SIR D. Then we'll consider that episode closed, and we'll make a fresh start.

MRS. D. Yes, ask me anything you please. I'm only too anxious to help you in getting at the truth.

SIR D. That ought not to be very difficult. [*Seats himself in revolving chair at writing-table, takes a pen and occasionally makes notes of her answers.*] Now, Felicia Hindemarsh was your cousin?

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. Her father was the vicar of Tawhampton?

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. And your other cousin — Annie Allen?

MRS. D. I had no other cousin. When you asked what my cousin's name was I couldn't say "Felicia Hindemarsh," so I gave the first name I could think of.

SIR D. Had you any other relatives in or near Tawhampton?

MRS. D. No.

SIR D. You were the only child of — [*consulting foolscap sheets*] of Robert and Sophia Allen?

MRS. D. Yes, my mother and her mother were sisters.

SIR D. [*reading from foolscap*]. Robert Allen, woollen manufacturer, Tawhampton. In eighty-seven, being in difficulties, he sold his business and went to Montreal. You, his only child, went with him, and five years later you married Charles Lewis Dane, surgeon, Montreal. You lived there till two years ago when your husband died, and a year ago you came back to England and took up your residence at Winchester.

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. There are, of course, people in Montreal who knew you intimately as MRS. Dane and can identify you.

MRS. D. Oh, yes, of course.

SIR D. Will you please make me out a list of their names and addresses?

MRS. D. Yes, certainly. Shall I do it now?

SIR D. No, by-and-by will do. Now to go back to your cousin, Felicia Hindemarsh. You have no idea where she is now?

MRS. D. Not the least.

SIR D. When was the last time you saw her?

MRS. D. When I left Tawhampton.

SIR D. When you left Tawhampton. [*Refers back to her statement.*] You haven't seen her since?

MRS. D. No. Sir Daniel, I feel I could collect my thoughts much better if

I were alone and had time to remember. I feel so confused —

SIR D. I'll try not to tax you, if you'll answer one or two simple questions.

MRS. D. Very well.

SIR D. Felicia Hindemarsh was younger or older than you?

MRS. D. A year younger.

SIR D. Have you any portrait of her?

MRS. D. No.

SIR D. You kept up a correspondence with her when you left England?

MRS. D. [*after a little pause*]. Yes.

SIR D. For how long?

MRS. D. For some years, I think.

SIR D. Have you any letter of hers?

MRS. D. No. After the dreadful affair in Vienna I destroyed everything.

SIR D. There would doubtless be persons in Tawhampton who would remember her as well as you?

MRS. D. Oh, yes, I should think. We only lived there as girls, and perhaps people might not recollect sufficiently to be sure —

SIR D. When Felicia Hindemarsh left Tawhampton, where did she go?

MRS. D. I don't quite know.

SIR D. But you had letters from her. Where did they come from?

MRS. D. Let me think — it was some seaside place I think. [*Pause.*]

SIR D. You don't remember?

MRS. D. No. I'm getting so terribly muddled, I don't know what I'm saying. — I — you frighten me!

SIR D. I frighten you?

[*His manner throughout has been calm and kind but very firm.*]

MRS. D. Yes. I know you're very kind, and that I've nothing to fear, but I feel — I feel as if I were being thumbscrewed, and if you ask me one more question I must shriek out for help. [*A little pause.*] I'm sure it would be better for me to go and write it all out when I'm alone. [*Making a movement to go.*] Don't you think so?

SIR D. [*arresting her with a gesture*]. No.

MRS. D. I'm in such a state that I can't be sure I'm giving you the right answers.

SIR D. [*calm, stern*]. You must be sure you are giving me the right answers. Come, now, sit down, and [*very kindly*] remember that I have not a single interest at stake except what is yours and Lionel's. Remember that I have no hope or desire in this matter, except to clear you triumphantly in the eyes of the world, and give you to Lionel for his wife. Now don't get anxious or excited. We'll soon get this tiresome business over!

MRS. D. Oh, I know I'm foolish, and you have been so patient and kind.

SIR D. This seaside place that Felicia Hindemarsh wrote from. Was it north, south, east, or west?

MRS. D. South, I think.

SIR D. Portsmouth, Brighton, Hastings, Eastbourne?

MRS. D. Brighton, I think.

SIR D. What was she doing there? [*No reply.*] You said your cousin was a governess?

MRS. D. I think she was pupil teacher at a school.

SIR D. Good. That's a clue.

MRS. D. A clue to what?

SIR D. If Felicia Hindemarsh was a pupil teacher at a school on the south coast, we shall doubtless be able to find out where it was, and some one who remembers her.

MRS. D. Yes. Yes. But I hope I shall find somebody at Tawhampton to-morrow —

SIR D. Yes. By the way, I'm free to-morrow, I think I'll run down to Tawhampton with you.

MRS. D. [*feigning delight*]. Will you? That will be such a help to me. You can tell me exactly what kind of evidence you want, and you can be sure whether people are telling the truth.

SIR D. Can I? [*Looking at her.*]

MRS. D. [*looking at him with the utmost frankness*]. I know that I shouldn't like to tell you what was false. I should feel that you would very soon drag the truth out of me. See how quickly you forced me to tell you that Felicia Hindemarsh was my cousin. And I'm glad you did! I should never have been happy or comfortable till I had told you and

Lionel. Then you will go down to Tawhampton with me.

SIR D. [*has been keenly watching her*]. If you don't mind.

MRS. D. I shall be delighted. I hope my head will be better, and that I shall be well enough to go.

SIR D. I hope so. If not, I'll take a little journey there by myself.

MRS. D. Ye-es—

SIR D. Was your cousin anything like you?

MRS. D. I think there was a likeness. I daresay it was that which made Mr. Risby mistake me for her.

SIR D. Possibly. But Mr. Fendick said the other day that you were not in the least like Felicia Hindemarsh.

MRS. D. Did he? But often one person sees a likeness where another sees none. What time shall we start for Tawhampton to-morrow?

SIR D. I'll look out the trains by-and-by. . . . Then you never saw your cousin after childhood?

MRS. D. No—I—I [*Suddenly breaks down.*] I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

SIR D. What?

MRS. D. Your questioning me as if I was guilty! I feel you suspect me still. Tell me, do you trust me thoroughly? [*He does not reply.*] Ah, you see you do not answer!—So be it. Make me out a list of the questions you want answered and I'll answer them. But I can endure this torture no longer.

[*Going to window.*]

SIR D. Stop. Come, my dear Lucy, this won't do. We are here to get at the truth, aren't we?

MRS. D. Yes, and you must see how ready and willing I am to answer your questions—I'm very faint—

SIR D. I'll only keep you a moment. Now I am going to ask you one question. Think well before you reply, because all your happiness and Lionel's depend upon my receiving a correct answer.

MRS. D. Well?!

SIR D. When was the last time you saw your cousin Felicia Hindemarsh?

[*A long pause.*]

MRS. D. I'll tell you everything.

SIR D. Go on.

MRS. D. I don't know what you'll think of me. I don't care. I'd almost rather everybody believed me guilty than suffer what I have done the last few weeks. It's horrible!

SIR D. When was the last time you saw Felicia Hindemarsh?

MRS. D. After the fearful scandal in Vienna she wrote to me in Montreal. She was desperate and begged us to shelter her. We had been like sisters, and I wrote to her to come out to us, and we would give her a home.

SIR D. And you did?

MRS. D. Yes, till her death.

SIR D. When was that?

MRS. D. About a year ago.

SIR D. Where? [*Pause.*]

MRS. D. At Montreal.

SIR D. She lived with you in Montreal—as Felicia Hindemarsh?

MRS. D. No; we called her Mrs. Allen.

SIR D. Give me the names and addresses of those people who knew you in Montreal as Mrs. Dane and her as Mrs. Allen.

MRS. D. I'll write them out. Let me bring it to you this evening. What are you going to do with it?

SIR D. I'm going to prove that you are Lucy Dane—*if you are Lucy Dane.* [*She looks at him.*]

SIR D. Does Risby know who you are?

MRS. D. What do you mean?

SIR D. Does Risby know who you are?

MRS. D. Yes—he knows that I am Mrs. Dane.

SIR D. The cousin of Felicia Hindemarsh.

MRS. D. [*after a pause*]. Yes.

SIR D. You told Risby, a mere acquaintance, that Felicia Hindemarsh was your cousin and you didn't tell Lionel, you didn't tell me?

MRS. D. I—I—— [*She looks at him.*] I—oh—I'll answer you no more. Believe what you please of me! I want no more of your help! Let me go!

SIR D. [*stopping her*]. How much does Risby know?

MRS. D. Don't I tell you he knows I am Mrs. Dane?

SIR D. Woman, you're lying!

MRS. D. [*flashes out on him*]. How dare you? How dare you?

SIR D. I say you're lying! You are Felicia Hindemarsh!

[*He looks at her steadily. Her eyes drop. She sinks on her knees before him, seizes his hand in supplication, looks at him appealingly; he angrily withdraws his hand.*]

MRS. D. Don't tell Lionel!

SIR D. [*with a little laugh*]. Not tell Lionel?

MRS. D. [*dry, quiet voice*]. I'm not a bad woman. You don't know. You wouldn't condemn me if you knew all.

SIR D. Tell me.

MRS. D. I'd been brought up in a village. I was a child in knowledge. I knew nothing of life, nothing of the world. Mr. Trent was very kind to me. He was rich and distinguished and flattered me by his notice. And I — oh, why didn't somebody warn me? Why did they keep me ignorant? I didn't even love him, not in that way — not as I love Lionel. I tell you I knew nothing! Nothing! Till it was too late! You believe me, don't you?

SIR D. Tell me all.

MRS. D. I hated myself. I should have hated him but he was very kind. It went on till all was discovered. His wife killed herself. He was frantic with grief and went out of his mind. I thought I'd kill myself — I did buy the poison — but I hadn't the courage. My cousin Lucy was living in Montreal. She was an angel — she took me into her home and gave out that I was a widow. My child was born there.

SIR D. There was a child?

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. Is it living?

MRS. D. Yes.

SIR D. Where is it?

MRS. D. In North Devon, with an old servant of ours. I see him every month. He is the sweetest boy, and I love him so much — next to Lionel. He'll never be any trouble — or disgrace. Now you know everything. I'm not a bad woman.

SIR D. I'm sorry for you, believe me, very sorry. But why did you wade through all that morass of lies and deceit? Why didn't you have the courage to tell me the truth?

MRS. D. Because I felt that you would part me from Lionel. If you loved a woman as I love him, wouldn't you tell lies, wouldn't you dare anything, to keep her? You know you would! You know you would! And so did I, and I would do it again. You won't tell Lionel?

SIR D. He must be told. And this marriage must be broken off.

MRS. D. Why? Nobody need know. Mr. Risby won't betray me. The detective can't. I've paid him and he daren't. You won't tell Lionel?

SIR D. He must be told.

MRS. D. It can be hushed up. I'll make him such a good wife. Give me this one chance — don't tell him. Give me this one chance!

SIR D. He must be told.

[*Enter* LIONEL *at window, excited.*]

LAL. Lucy, I went for the keys; they weren't there. The escritoire was locked. Just as I was coming away Risby came up with a note for you. While he was talking at the door with the maid, she said something about his having called upon you this morning before lunch. Was that so? You met him here as if you hadn't seen him. I couldn't understand it — I've been questioning him all this time, but he only puts me off. He says I must ask you —

MRS. D. [*to* SIR DANIEL]. Tell him.

[*Enter* LADY EASTNEY.]

LADY E. Well, how is it going? Have you got all the evidence you want?

MRS. D. Will you come home with me? I wish to speak to you.

LADY E. What's the matter?

MRS. D. Come home with me.

LADY E. What has happened?

MRS. D. I want a friend. Don't be hard on me! Don't be hard on me!

[*Exit* MRS. DANE, *followed by* LADY EASTNEY. LIONEL *is going after them.*]

SIR D. [*holds up his hand, stops him*]. Lal — !

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The same as Act III. Time, the following Saturday evening. Windows open. Discover* LAL, *very haggard and restless, walking up and down. Enter* WILSON *at door, goes over to window, stops.*

WILSON. Sir Daniel has finished dinner, sir. [*No reply. Exit* WILSON *at window, returns in a few moments bringing in a rug and a light garden chair, which he leaves in the window; he folds the rug and places it on arm of sofa.*] Shall I keep any dinner for you, sir?

LAL. Eh—no thank you, Wilson.

[*Exit* WILSON *at door.* LAL *comes down to sofa and sits in a despairing attitude.*]

[*Enter* JANET *at door in evening dress—at first she does not see him.*]

JANET. I beg pardon.

LAL. Janet—you wish to see my father?

JANET. No, I've just left him. Auntie and I have been dining here.

LAL. Oh, yes. I'd forgotten.

JANET. We wondered what had become of you. Why didn't you come in to dinner?

LAL. I'm not fit for any company but my own.

JANET. Sir Daniel and Auntie are taking coffee in the veranda. Won't you come and join them?

LAL. I'd rather not. Please don't take any notice of me.

[*She is going off at door—he sits down again in despair—she suddenly stops; comes back to him.*]

JANET. Mr. Carteret, I don't know what has happened. But I can see there's something the matter with you. Perhaps you've had a great sorrow. Well, you'll pull yourself together and be a man. It'll take you all your time, I've no doubt, but you've just got to do it, d'ye understand?

LAL. I'll try.

JANET. And you needn't think that you're the only poor body on earth that's badly used. For if ye did but know there's many a man, and many a wee bit of a woman that has just as thankless a lot as yours. So I'd not be wasting too much pity on myself if I were you.

LAL. I won't, Janet.

JANET. And if you've lost one friend perhaps that may be the very means of showing you the value of them that are left.

[*Enter* LADY EASTNEY, *at door, in dinner dress.*]

JANET. I've just been giving him the very best advice in the world.

LADY E. How d'ye do, Lionel?

LAL. How d'ye do, Lady Eastney?

LADY E. [*comes very tenderly and sympathetically to him, takes both hands of his in hers, looks at him, shakes her head at him*]. No sleep again? No appetite?

LAL [*withdraws his hands*]. I can't eat. And I feel I shall never sleep again.

LADY E. Your father is grieving very much about you.

LAL. I'm sorry, for there never was anybody less worth grieving about than I am.

LADY E. Go to him. Try and eat something just to please him.

LAL. It would choke me. Don't bother any more about me, Lady Eastney. I daresay I shall get over it by the time I'm dead. [*Going off at window.*]

LADY E. Lionel! [*He stops. In a low tone.*] You've not seen her since—

LAL. No, I've kept my word, and broken my heart. I heard the clock chime every quarter of an hour last night. I feel I should like to lie at the bottom of the river to-night where I couldn't hear it.

[*Going off at window.*]

LADY E. Lionel, where are you going?

LAL. Does it matter where I go or what becomes of me?

JANET [*trying to stop him*]. Mr. Carteret—

LAL. Let me be, Janet!

[*Going off at window.*]

LADY E. Lionel! you won't do anything rash?

LAL [*at window*]. You needn't fear I

shall kill myself. I'm too much of a coward. But — tell my father I can keep my promise no longer. I'm going across to her. [*Exit at window.*]

JANET [*bursts into tears and throws her arms round* LADY EASTNEY'S *neck*]. Auntie, I can just bear it no longer! My heart will break! Let Mrs. Patterson take me away — anything — anything — so that I can be at work and forget!

LADY E. Hush, hush! You mustn't be a coward!

[*Enter* SIR DANIEL *at door.* JANET *controls herself.*]

LADY E. There! There's a brave Janet.

JANET. I'm just a poor silly body that ought to know better!

LADY E. Janet, would you go home and look in my dressing-table. You'll find a sleeping powder in the second drawer —

JANET. Yes, I know.

LADY E. Bring it to me here.

JANET. Yes, Auntie. [*Exit.*]

LADY E. We must manage to give Lionel a little sleep to-night. He's nearly distracted for want of it.

SIR D. Poor fellow! I'm rather glad he has taken it so violently.

LADY E. Why?

SIR D. It means that in six months it will be out of his system.

LADY E. It's a genuine love. Don't you think it will last?

SIR D. A few months. But even if it goes deeper than I think it does, it must be broken off.

LADY E. Why? Nobody except ourselves need know that this story is true.

SIR D. The Bulsom-Porters know it — the whole neighborhood must know it before long.

LADY E. The Bulsom-Porters think that Mr. Risby was really mistaken. The Canon has them to dinner to-night, and he's doing his best to get her to sign the apology you drew up.

SIR D. We can't ask Mrs. Bulsom-Porter for an apology now!

LADY E. Indeed we can. Whatever happens to Mrs. Dane, I'm quite determined Mrs. Bulsom-Porter shall make a handsome apology, and everybody shall know it; then I don't think the story will ever be repeated.

SIR D. And will Mrs. Dane continue to live in Sunningwater?

LADY E. She's quite willing to do whatever you and Lionel wish. I've been with her all the afternoon. Oh, the pearls of wisdom and good advice that dropped from this small mouth! And I felt myself such a transcendent humbug all the while!

SIR D. Why?

LADY E. Aren't we all humbugs? Isn't it all a sham? Don't we all have one code on our lips and another in our hearts, one set of rules to admonish our neighbors, and another to guide our own conduct? Why should I lecture that poor woman on her duty to Society? Why should I take her name off my visiting list and pretend that I can't know her?

SIR D. Because you're a virtuous woman, and she isn't.

LADY E. That's true — as it happens — and so far as it goes. Small credit to me! I wasn't in her place — I didn't meet with her temptations — and if I had I should have been cold-hearted enough, or cunning enough to resist.

SIR D. Very well. That's all a man can ask; the temperament — call it virtue or cunning — that resists.

LADY E. Not a pretty kind of cunning, that! And sometimes the man gets the other kind of cunning — the cunning that conceals!

SIR D. Very well. We can't help ourselves. But at any rate the outside of the platter must be clean.

LADY E. Oh, aren't you Pharisees and tyrants, all of you? And don't you make cowards and hypocrites of all of us? Don't you lead us into sin and then condemn us for it? Aren't you first our partners and then our judges?

SIR D. The rules of the game are severe. If you don't like them, leave the sport alone. They will never be altered.

LADY E. But where's the justice of the whole business? Here is this poor woman whom Lionel loves, and who loves

Lionel with all her heart — why shouldn't he marry her?

Sir D. If he were your son would you wish him to marry her? Would you wish all his after-life to be poisoned by the thought that she had deceived him, that she had belonged to another man, and that man and his child still living? Do, for heaven's sake, let us get rid of all this sentimental cant and sophistry about this woman business. [*Unconsciously getting very heated.*] A man demands the treasure of a woman's purest love. It's what he buys and pays for with the strength of his arm and the sweat of his brow. It's the condition on which he makes her his wife and fights the world for her and his children. It's his fiercest instinct, and he does well to guard it; for it's the very mainspring of a nation's health and soundness. And whatever I've done, whatever I've been myself, I'm quite resolved my son sha'n't marry another man's mistress. There's the plain sense of the whole matter, so let us have no more talk about patching up things that ought not to be patched up, that can't be patched up, and that sha'n't be patched up if I can stop them from being patched up!

Lady E. [*looks at him very much amused*]. I wouldn't get into a temper about it if I were you.

Sir D. Am I in a temper? Pray forgive me.

Lady E. I rather like you in a temper. It shows me that if I marry you, you'd be my master.

Sir D. Let me assure you I'd try. Will you take me?

Lady E. Couldn't you manage to put a little of the fervor you waste on social ethics into your love-making?

Sir D. I'll try. Will you take me?

Lady E. [*pauses, looks at him merrily*]. I'm really half inclined —

[*Enter* Wilson *at door.*]

Wilson. Canon Bonsey would like to speak to you for a moment, Sir Daniel.

Sir D. Show him in.

[*Exit* Wilson.]

Lady E. He has come from the Bulsom-Porters. Now remember that we can't go back from the position we have taken up — the fullest apology.

[*Enter* Wilson *showing in* Canon Bonsey.]

Wilson [*announcing*]. Canon Bonsey.

[*Enter* Canon. *Exit* Wilson.]

Canon. How d'ye do, Sir Daniel? How d'ye do, Lady Eastney?

Lady E. [*shaking hands*]. How d'ye do, Canon?

Canon [*making a wry face*]. I've had the Bulsom-Porters to dinner. And seeing that Bulsom-Porter knows a glass of good wine I felt bound to bring out my elegant eighty-nine Ayala and my sixty-three port. I cannot imagine a more unworthy office for either vintage than that of assisting Mrs. Bulsom-Porter's digestion. However, I've persuaded her to go home and fetch the apology you drew up last Saturday. They're coming on here, and I think, with a little judicious handling, we shall persuade the lady to sign it. Don't I hear voices? [*Goes to the window.*] They're coming. Eh? [*Looks very grave and shocked.*] They're quarrelling in the lane. I heard an ejaculation from Bulsom-Porter which ill accords with the sylvan beauty of the scene. What?!

[*Exit quickly at window.*]

Sir D. Take care how you work this apology business. Suppose Mrs. Bulsom-Porter finds out that we know Mrs. Dane is an impostor?

Lady E. We don't know it. Mr. Risby and the detective say she isn't. I intend that Mrs. Dane shall leave this place, if she does leave it, without a stain on her character. And I intend that Mrs. Bulsom-Porter shall stay in it, if she does stay in it, as a self-confessed scandal-monger.

Sir D. But I can't exact an apology —

Lady E. [*very firmly*]. I can! Hush! [*As the* Canon *appears at window.*]

[Canon *enters at window leading in* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter *very carefully.* Bulsom-Porter *follows.* Bulsom-Porter *and* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter *are*

evidently in a bad temper with each other.]

CANON. Take care of the window-threshold. Perhaps Sir Daniel will excuse us entering this way?

SIR D. Certainly. [*To* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER, *shaking hands.*] How d'ye do?

MRS. BUL.-P. How d'ye do, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. How d'ye do?

[*To* BULSOM-PORTER. BULSOM-PORTER *says nothing, but shakes hands, glances at* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER. SIR DANIEL *gives a sympathetic handshake behind the back of* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER, *who is exchanging a constrained bow with* LADY EASTNEY.]

CANON [*to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER]. Did you bring the paper?

MRS. BUL.-P. [*produces the paper that* SIR DANIEL *has given her at the end of Act II*]. I shall not sign this.

CANON [*taken aback*]. But, my dear lady, I understood you at dinner to say that you would sign it.

MRS. BUL.-P. Yes. But, since dinner, Mr. Bulsom-Porter has chosen to use such dreadful language to me, that I must first of all insist upon an apology from him.

[CANON *turns helplessly to* BULSOM-PORTER.]

BUL.-P. Tell her to kindly send in a form of an apology to Rawlinson, my lawyer, and I'll sign it.

CANON. Hush! [*Turns to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] Mr. Bulsom-Porter is only too anxious to withdraw his language to you, as I am sure you are only too anxious to withdraw your allegations against Mrs. Dane.

MRS. BUL.-P. I object to the word "allegations." I made certain statements—

CANON. "Statements," by all means. Which you are anxious to withdraw.

MRS. BUL.-P. I object to the word "withdraw."

CANON. Which you will not repeat.

MRS. BUL.-P. Which will not be repeated. The word "apologize" is used in this paper. I cannot apologize to Mrs. Dane. I would rather go to gaol.

[CANON *goes to* BULSOM-PORTER.]

BUL.-P. [*in a low tone, but sufficiently loud for his wife to hear*]. Kindly arrange a settlement on that basis.

CANON [*tries to soothe him*]. Hush! [*To* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER.] You will not apologize. I suppose you would not mind expressing your regret?

MRS. BUL.-P. I do not mind some slight expression of regret, but I will never apologize.

CANON [*helpless*]. Sir Daniel, what do you advise under the circumstances?

SIR D. [*looks at* LADY EASTNEY]. Well, I—a—

LADY E. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, will you please allow me to look at that paper? [MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *gives paper to* LADY EASTNEY, *who reads it.* LADY EASTNEY, *having read.*] I'm surprised!

MRS. BUL.-P. At what?

LADY E. At Sir Daniel's moderation. [SIR DANIEL *makes a face.*] I don't think you quite realize the very awkward position you are in.

MRS. BUL.-P. How?

LADY E. [*to* BULSOM-PORTER]. You thoroughly approve of this?

BUL-P. Most certainly.

LADY E. Sir Daniel, what would happen if Mr. Bulsom-Porter were to instruct his lawyer to offer his own apologies to Mrs. Dane, at the same time declaring that he wouldn't hold himself responsible for what Mrs. Bulsom-Porter does or says.

SIR D. Well, a—I scarcely know.

MRS. BUL.-P. I shall not be bound by my husband's actions.

LADY E. Isn't it whether he will be bound by yours? The only question is as to how far Mr. Bulsom-Porter is prepared to go—

BUL.-P. My dear Lady Eastney, I am prepared to go to any lengths. I will offer Mrs. Dane the most abject apology on my knees, and I will allow her lawyer to dictate it in any terms and make any use of it that he pleases.

LADY E. I think that will meet our views, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. Yes, yes. I think so—

LADY E. Mrs. Dane will then bring her action against Mrs. Bulsom-Porter?

SIR D. Yes, I suppose so—

MRS. BUL.-P. Action against me?

LADY E. And call Mr. Bulsom-Porter for a witness —

MRS. BUL.-P. What? My husband will not dare —

BUL.-P. [*very sympathetic*]. My dear, I shall!

LADY E. I suppose there is no doubt whatever of the effect upon the jury, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. None whatever, I should say — or upon the judge.

LADY E. [*to* MRS. BULSOM-PORTER]. Don't you see what a very awkward position you are in? Mr. Bulsom-Porter, will you step across to Mrs. Dane with me at once?

BUL.-P. Delighted.

LADY E. [*to* BULSOM-PORTER]. My cloak is in the next room.

[*Going off at door.*]

MRS. BUL.-P. One moment! I do not object to sign this if Sir Daniel will remove the word "apology."

LADY E. It must be signed exactly as it stands.

MRS. BUL.-P. No! I will do anything that Sir Daniel may require, but I will not apologize.

LADY E. Now, Mr. Bulsom-Porter ——

MRS. BUL.-P. One moment, please. [*Very long pause.*] Sir Daniel, if I had to sign this — agreement, where should I have to put my name?

SIR D. [*pointing*]. There.

LADY E. [*takes up a pen from writing-table*]. Do you like a broad nib? Or a quill?

MRS. BUL.-P. Neither.

LADY E. [*takes up another*]. This seems a nice one.

[MRS. BULSOM-PORTER *takes it after great hesitation, at last dashes off the signature and bursts into a fit of hysterical tears.*]

LADY E. [*offering pen*]. Canon will you sign as witness?

CANON. Certainly. [*Signs.*]

LADY E. And I will put my autograph, and then the interesting document will be complete. [*Signs.*]

CANON. And peace will be restored to my distracted parish.

MRS. BUL.-P. [*getting more and more hysterical*]. If any future question arises, I wish it to be distinctly understood that my signature was forced from me, against my will, and under threats from my husband — and — I'm quite sure Jim Risby knows something dreadful about that woman — and if my husband had the least sense of what was due to his wife — I — understand — I do not apologize. I have not, and I never will apologize, and, oh — [*to* BULSOM-PORTER]. Let me pass, sir! Let me pass!

[*Exit in hysterics at window.*]

BUL.-P. [*very quietly*]. It's my silver wedding on the twentieth of next month.

CANON [*to* BULSOM-PORTER]. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter seemed very much upset. Oughtn't one of us attend her home?

BUL.-P. Well, perhaps, you will.

[CANON *goes up to window — stops, comes back.*]

CANON. Perhaps we had better both go. Are you ready?

BUL.-P. [*shrugs his shoulder*]. I shall be there before Mrs. Bulsom-Porter has recovered. Good-night, Sir Daniel. My very best thanks. Good-night, my dear Lady Eastney, you have saved me from a law-suit and a thousand pounds damages.

LADY E. Don't mention it. Good-night.

BUL.-P. Now, Canon!

[*Goes to window, takes out cigar and lights it at window.*]

CANON. Good-night, Sir Daniel.

SIR D. Good-night, my dear Canon.

CANON. Good-night, dear Lady Eastney.

LADY E. [*shaking hands*]. Good-night, Canon.

CANON. Give my kindest regards to Mrs. Dane. Of course she will take the stall at the bazaar. And I'll bring the Duchess to call upon her one day next week.

[*Exit after* BULSOM-PORTER *at window.*]

SIR D. Did you hear that?

LADY E. Yes. I must persuade Mrs. Dane to go away for a few months.

SIR D. And then?

LADY E. I do want to save Mrs. Dane. How can I?

Sir D. Impossible. The thing can't be patched up. It ought not to be patched up.

Lady E. What is to be done?

Sir D. We must get Lal away from her; take him out to Egypt; give him some work; throw him into young society, and trust to time and his healthy instincts to bring him round.

Lady E. I suppose you are right. But in any case I'll give Mrs. Dane this certificate of character from Mrs. Bulsom-Porter.

[*Taking up the paper which* Mrs. Bulsom-Porter *has signed.*]

[*Enter* Janet *at door with evening cloak over her dress.*]

Janet. Here is the sleeping powder, Auntie. Will you be coming home now?

Lady E. In a little while, darling. [*Passing her hand caressingly over* Janet's *forehead.*] Why, how hot and feverish your forehead is. Go and sit under the cedars till I'm ready.

[*Taking* Janet *towards window; they both stop;* Janet *hides her head on* Lady Eastney's *shoulders;* Lady Eastney *takes her off at door as* Lal *enters at window.*]

Lal. I've broken my word. I've seen her. I've asked her to come over here and see you. You won't refuse to receive her?

Sir D. No. I wish to see her.

Lal. I'll fetch her — [*Going off.*]

Sir D. Stay. Lal, this must end. You must give her up.

Lal. I can't. I won't! Why should I? She was sinned against, not sinning. She was ignorant! She knew no better!

Sir D. Get rid of that sorry cant, my lad. Every girl of fifteen knows black from white, knows her right hand from her left, knows that if she lets some plausible scoundrel rob her of her jewel, she'll by-and-by come a beggared bride to a cheated bridegroom!

Lal. I don't care! I love her! And I shall never be happy with anybody else.

Sir D. Do you think you'll be happy with her when the first burst of passion is over? Don't you think you'll begin to remember that she has deceived you, hoodwinked you, that her lover is now living, that his child is now living? Remember! You haven't had all her love! She loved and gave herself away before she knew you —

[Lal, *mad with resentment, raises both arms as if he would strike* Sir Daniel.]

Sir D. Ah! that stabs you, does it? Don't you think that same thought will come and stab you continually? Say in a few years some good-looking friend comes along and is civil to her. She's civil to him. You'll begin to wonder how far it has gone; you'll remember that she can deceive; you won't be sure; you'll question her; she'll reassure you; she'll swear and re-swear and swear again, but you'll never be certain; you may be wronging her but — she may be wronging you. You'll never know. All that you'll know is, "She can lie; she lied to me; she lied to my father; she lied to all of us; she lied, and lied, and lied, — is she lying to me now?" And you'll never know. Your life will be a very hell to you.

Lal. So be it! Hell with her, rather than heaven with any other woman!

Sir D. Nonsense! Pull yourself together! Put all your heart and soul into your work. You'll have an awful three months, an awful six months perhaps. But you'll conquer yourself. You'll be a better and stronger and braver man all your life for it. Love isn't the only thing on earth. It oughtn't always to be the first —

Lal. What's the use of your preaching to me? You've never been in love.

Sir D. You think that?

Lal. You've never loved a woman as I love her and then had to give her up.

Sir D. [*very tenderly and impressively*]. My boy, I loved one woman when you were a child — ah, I did love her — you don't know what love is, if you compare your hot boyish passion of a few weeks with my deep love of years. I gave her up; we gave each other up; it broke our hearts but we did it — her son doesn't blush when he remembers

her — you and I have stood by her grave together —

LAL [*startled*]. Sir!

[*Looks at* SIR DANIEL.]

SIR D. Do you think I'd deny her son anything? Don't you think I'd give all I have in the world to make him happy? And when I ask him to renounce an unworthy love, a love that will by-and-by bring him to misery — [*A cry of anguish from* LAL.] You'll do it, Lal! I'm not asking you to do what I haven't done myself! You'll do it?

LAL. Yes, sir.

[*A warm handshake.* MRS. DANE *comes to window, not seen by the audience. She is unseen by* LAL, *but* SIR DANIEL *sees her and makes her a motion; she withdraws.*]

SIR D. Let me say good-bye for you.

LAL. Mustn't I see her?

SIR D. It will be better not.

LAL. You'll be very kind to her?

SIR D. She will find me the truest and best of friends to her and her child. Go into the other room — Lady Eastney is there. I think she has something for you.

LAL. Be very gentle to her —

[SIR DANIEL *reassures him with a look and a grasp of the hand. Exit* LAL *at door.*]

[MRS. DANE *enters.*]

SIR D. What have you heard?

MRS. D. Enough. You mean to part us then?

SIR D. It is not I who will part you.

MRS. D. Who will, then?

SIR D. Yourself. You wish him to be happy?

MRS. D. I have no other wish in the world.

SIR D. I believe that if you hold up your finger and beckon him he will come to you from the end of the world and marry you.

MRS. D. [*delighted*]. Ah!

SIR D. What does that mean? He is on the threshold of a fine career; devoted to his work, with a large circle of friends. If you become his wife, will you tell them your history? They will all fall away from you. Will you hide it? That's impossible. He loves you now, but in a few years' time — dare you put his love to such a test? Dare you marry him knowing that day by day he must help you deceive till disclosure comes; and then, day by day, he must endure social isolation *with* you, disorder and failure in his career *for* you — dare you marry him? Will it be for your own happiness?

MRS. D. My happiness! What does that matter? Tell me what is best for him?

SIR D. Don't you know what is best for him? [*A long pause.*]

MRS. D. So be it! Say "Good-bye" to him for me.

[*Enter* LADY EASTNEY *at door, bringing cloak on her arm.*]

LADY E. I've something for you.

[*Taking the paper from her pocket, and giving it to* MRS. DANE.]

MRS. D. [*takes the paper, reads it, smiles very bitterly*]. Thank you.

LADY E. What have you decided to do?

MRS. D. I'm going to Devonshire to-morrow. I shall make a long stay there. I sha'n't let him know where I am. How is he now?

LADY E. He's quieter. I've persuaded him to take a mouthful of food and some wine. I put a strong sleeping powder in the wine, so he'll sleep to-night, poor fellow.

MRS. D. He'll sleep to-night, poor fellow. Tell him about my going away when you think he can bear it. I needn't stay, need I? Thank you for this — [*referring to paper*] but what's the use of it?

LADY E. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter daren't attack your reputation now.

MRS. D. Reputation? Reputation isn't much, is it, when love has gone? Don't think I'm ungrateful to you — [*tearing it*] but I sha'n't trouble to defend my reputation. Good-bye, Sir Daniel. Don't you think the world is very hard on a woman?

SIR D. It isn't the world that's hard. It isn't men and women. Am I hard? Call on me at any time, and you shall

find me the truest friend to you and yours. Is Lady Eastney hard? She has been fighting all the week to save you.

MRS. D. Then who is it, what is it, drives me out?

SIR D. The law, the hard law that we didn't make, that we would break if we could, for we are all sinners at heart — the law that is above us all, made for us all, that we can't escape from, that we must keep or perish.

MRS. D. Won't it do if we pretend to keep it, and force our neighbors to keep it instead?

SIR D. Even that shows that we own the law.

MRS. D. Only we mustn't get found out. I'm afraid I've broken that part of the law. Good-bye, Sir Daniel.

SIR D. I'll see you across to your home.

MRS. D. No, I would rather you didn't. Just put me outside your palings and then I'll find my way. Good-bye, Lady Eastney.

LADY E. Good-bye. [*Shaking hands warmly.*] Write to me. Tell how you are. Will you? I shall be pleased to hear.

MRS. D. If ever I come here again, will you receive me?

LADY E. [*after a pause*]. If you call, I shall be at home.

MRS. D. God bless you! Now, Sir Daniel, you shall see me outside the palings — no further. I shall see my boy to-morrow.

[*Exit at window followed by* SIR DANIEL. LADY EASTNEY *goes up to window. Enter* LAL *at door looking very much quieter but rather bewildered as if under the influence of a sleeping draught.*]

LAL. Well?

LADY E. How tired you look!

[*Takes him to sofa.*]

LAL. Well? [*Sits on sofa.*] I shall get over this you know.

LADY E. I'm sure you will.

LAL. Father is right. I shall go out to Sir Robert and get on with this railway — and then I —

[*He shows symptoms of sleepiness.* LADY EASTNEY *watches him a moment and then goes to window. He lies on sofa, a distant church clock chimes, and strikes eleven.* SIR DANIEL *re-enters at window and they come to* LAL. *They stand watching him.*]

SIR D. We'll take him off to Egypt — you'll come and bring Janet?

LADY E. [*nods*]. It's getting late. Where is Janet? [*Calls indoors.*] Janet! Janet! Janet! I suppose she has gone, poor child. Will you please take me home?

SIR D. Say that in a little while I shall not have to take you home.

LADY E. I think I could feel at home with you.

SIR D. Say that you *are* at home now.

LADY E. [*takes his arm*]. I am at home now.

[SIR DANIEL *turns off the electric light. Exeunt at window. A little pause.* JANET *enters at door, comes up to* LAL *who is lying on the sofa in the moonlight; she looks at him, bends over him and kisses him.* CURTAIN *falls as she goes off at window.*]

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J. W. Cunliffe, *Modern English Playwrights* (Harper's, 1927), pages 28-33. Jones's technical shortcomings.

Other plays of similar character:

Michael and His Lost Angel (H. A. Jones)
The Wounded Bird (Alfred Capus)
The Enigma (Paul Hervieu)
Young Woodley (John Van Druten)

QUESTIONS ON "MRS. DANE'S DEFENCE"

1. What is the problem of the play? Is the solution of the play problem satisfactory?

2. What character is introduced primarily to afford a happy ending?

3. Is the author justified in calling this play a comedy?

4. Discuss the character of Canon Bonsey.

5. Does the play seem old-fashioned? Defend your answer.

6. To what extent does Mrs. Dane gain your sympathy?

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

Arthur Wing Pinero was born in London on May 24, 1855. Although his early intentions were to follow in the footsteps of his father as a solicitor, he deserted his father's law office before he was twenty and became an actor. His experience on the stage in London and in the provinces in all sorts of rôles in all kinds of plays provided an admirable training for the future dramatist. Most valuable of all were the five years spent with Irving's incomparable company at the Lyceum. For fifty years he has been writing and producing plays ranging from such sentimental mid-Victorian comedies as *Sweet Lavender* (1888) to the stern, uncompromising, Continental-like character studies of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Mid-Channel*.

Pinero's chief excellence is in his dramatic technique. He knows thoroughly the stage and its demands; and not only in the superb craftsmanship of the play as a whole is he a master, but also in the details of exposition, entrance and exit of characters, foreshadowing, dialogue, and stage arrangement. Although influenced by Ibsen in regard to subject-matter — realistic treatment of subjects of social and intellectual interest — he never makes his plays primarily studies of ideas or problems, but reserves the greater emphasis to bestow upon his characters. It is in character that Pinero is most interested, even though critics insist upon considering him mainly as a clever craftsman. He asserts that he imagines his characters first, and then projects them, already carefully thought out as living people, into a dramatic situation. It is certain that playgoer or reader can not easily forget Paula, Iris, Letty, Rose Trelawney, Zoe Blundell.

Critics disagree in estimating Pinero. Ludwig Lewisohn finds him conventional, humorous, and undistinguished in style. John W. Cunliffe dismisses him as "little more than a clever stage craftsman admirable as a contriver of a lively drawing-room comedy, but holding no permanent place in dramatic literature." William Archer speaks warmly of "the splendid comedies and dramas with which, undiscouraged by the most glacial criticism, he has enriched our literature." Clayton Hamilton places him in the topmost rank of the dramatists of the past thirty years as a craftsman and delineator of character. It is generally agreed, however, that his best plays are *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899), *Iris* (1901), *The Thunderbolt* (1908), and *Mid-Channel* (1909). It is often asserted that the modern English drama begins with the fearless study of Paula Tanqueray.

Iris is one of the masterpieces of modern drama. It is primarily a character study of a woman of refined tastes and a potentially high moral sense, one who has grown a slave to a luxurious life of ease and comfort, and who lacks the courage to discard this ease and comfort on the day of misfortune although to retain them means moral compromise. If life had continued to be kind to Iris, she might have remained a generous, fine spirited woman; in time of adversity, however, the weakness of her moral fiber leads her to compromise, and Pinero ruthlessly exposes the inevitable moral disintegration of one who always takes the easiest way. Iris remained to the last the common yet naïve belief that one can eat his cake and have it too. The ending of the play at once suggests that of Ibsen's *Doll's House*. According to William Archer, Pinero first planned to end the play with the throttling of Iris by Maldonado, but the present Ibsen-like ending is far more effective in emphasizing the full tragic effect of Iris's fatal weakness of character. In this case, uncertainty of life is more harrowing than certainty of death would be.

IRIS
(1901)

BY

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

CHARACTERS

FREDERICK MALDONADO
LAURENCE TRENWITH
CROKER HARRINGTON
ARCHIBALD KANE
COLONEL WYNNING
SERVANT AT MRS. BELLAMY'S IN KENSINGTON
SERVANT AT THE VILLA PRIGNO

IRIS BELLAMY
FANNY SYLVAIN
AUREA VYSE
MRS. WYNNING
MISS PINSENT
WOMAN-SERVANT AT THE VILLA PRIGNO
WOMAN-SERVANT AT THE FLAT IN PARK STREET

ACT I: London. Mrs. Bellamy's house in Kensington.

ACT II: Italy. The Villa Prigno at Cadenabbia on the Lake of Como.

ACT III: The Same.

ACT IV: London. A flat in Park Street.

ACT V: The Same.

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IRIS

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents two drawing-rooms of equal size upon the ground floor of a house in Kensington. In the wall separating the rooms are two arched entrances — the one on the right-hand side, the other on the left — and in the center between these entrances, is a fireplace. Over the fireplace is an opening, shaped and framed like a mirror; so that, with the view gained through the archways, the further room is almost entirely disclosed. In this further room, on the left, is a single door admitting to a small apartment; in the center, at the back, is a conservatory seen through glazed doors; and on the right is a window affording a view of a garden. On the left-hand side of the room nearer the spectator are double-doors opening from the inner hall of the house; and, on the right, facing these doors, there is a spacious circular bow in which are three french-windows also looking on to the garden. The rooms are richly furnished and decorated. In the further room a grand piano — adorned with paintings in the style of Watteau and Lancret — and a music-stool stand by the window. By the side of the piano is a chair; and on the other side of the room are two chairs, placed together, under the branches of a high palm. Against the walls are cabinets containing articles de vertu. *In the nearer room there is an armchair on each side of the fireplace, and, facing the fireplace, a luxurious "Chesterfield" settee with a piece of rich silk draped over the back. Behind the settee stands a French ottoman. On the left of the room are a settee of a more formal kind, a table, and a "window-stool"; and on the right a writing-table and two chairs — the one in front of the table, the other by the side of it. Also on the right, between the bow and the entrance to the further room, another high palm shelters a smaller settee. There are flowers in profusion; some are arranged in vases and jardinières, while a bank of blossom partially conceals the fireplace.*

The light is that of a fine evening in summer. The warm glow of sunset is seen in the garden and in the conservatory.

[NOTE: — *The descriptions of the scenery, and the directions for the movement of the characters, are set out as from the point of view of the audience. Thus, Right and Left are the spectator's right and left, not the actor's.*]

[MISS PINSENT, *a cheerful young lady in dinner dress, is seated at the writing-table, writing. A man-servant enters from the hall.*

SERVANT. Mr. Kane.

[*The servant is followed by* ARCHIBALD KANE, *a "smart," well-tailored man of middle age. He carries an opera hat, wears an orchid in his buttonhole, and has an air of some authority.*]

MISS PINSENT [*Advancing and shaking hands with him cordially*]. How do you do? [*To the* SERVANT, *who withdraws.*] Tell Mrs. Bellamy. [*To* KANE.] She is not down yet.

KANE. Don't be scandalized at my

premature appearance. She has asked me to give her a few minutes' talk before her guests arrive.

MISS PINSENT [*laughingly*]. I see. For a quarter of an hour you are not a guest.

KANE [*in the same spirit*]. Merely a hard-working, conscientious solicitor. And how are you, my dear Miss Pinsent?

MISS PINSENT. I? [*Again at the writing-table, putting the writing-materials in order.*] A woman who has the good fortune to be attached to the household of such a sweet creature as Mrs. Bellamy can't be otherwise than robust and happy.

KANE. I need not ask after her; she was looking radiant at Hurlingham on Saturday.

MISS PINSENT. Yes— out of the house.

KANE. Nothing amiss, I hope?

MISS PINSENT. She seems depressed, in low spirits.

KANE. The end of the season — fatigue.

MISS PINSENT. Scarcely. She has been fretting for weeks.

KANE. Fretting?

MISS PINSENT. Brooding.

KANE. Upon what?

MISS PINSENT. What does my sex brood over? Religion, the affections, the discovery of a gray hair, anything, everything. [*Returning to him.*] I rather fancy the old grievance still irritates her occasionally.

KANE. The old — ?

MISS PINSENT. Her husband's will.

KANE. Ho! Poor dear lady, will she never become reconciled to its conditions?

MISS PINSENT. Never is a big word. After all, these are early days.

KANE. She has been five years a widow.

MISS PINSENT. She is only six-and-twenty now.

KANE. And well-off, as far as her heedlessness in money-matters will permit of her being so. Let her compare her situation with that of other women. Six-and-twenty and independent!

MISS PINSENT. And unable to remarry!

KANE. She could commit even that indiscretion if she pleased.

MISS PINSENT. Under penalty of losing every penny of her income.

KANE. If she married a rich man, her interest in her late husband's estate would be no longer indispensable to her.

MISS PINSENT. Rich men generally have some odious quality to counterbalance their wealth. The men one would marry are as poor as mice.

KANE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Well, wills such as Mr. George Adair Bellamy's are common enough.

MISS PINSENT. The more's the shame. [*With mock severity.*] I wonder you care to be a trustee under so iniquitous an instrument.

KANE. Ha, ha! the position isn't altogether a bed of roses. It has already worried my fellow-trustee, poor Mr. Cautherley, into his grave. However, we ought not to discuss Mrs. Bellamy's affairs too freely.

MISS PINSENT. Of course not; I beg your pardon. [*With a change of manner.*] I say, Mr. Kane.

KANE. Yes?

MISS PINSENT. I wish you would render me a service.

KANE. Delighted.

MISS PINSENT. You are connected with a number of little concerns that pay decent dividends, aren't you — nice, snug little schemes that the public isn't allowed to dip its hands into?

KANE. Who tells you so?

MISS PINSENT. Mrs. Bellamy. She says you do wonders for her great friend, Miss Sylvain, and for Mr. Harrington.

KANE. Well?

MISS PINSENT. I've managed to scrape together nearly three hundred pounds. To you it's the merest trifle, but — [*coaxingly*] you might help a poor lady's companion to increase her store.

KANE. Ha, ha!

MISS PINSENT. Don't laugh. Let me come and see you, will you?

KANE. Honored.

MISS PINSENT. In Lincoln's Inn Fields?

KANE [*writing on his shirt-cuff*]. To-orrow?

MISS PINSENT [*with a nod*]. At what ne?

KANE. Four o'clock?

MISS PINSENT. Oh, I'm awfully bliged; I—[*listening*] This is she, I ink.

[IRIS, *richly but delicately gowned, enters, at the door in the further room, drawing on her gloves. She comes to* KANE *and gives him her hand. She is a beautiful woman, with a soft, appealing voice and movements instinct with simple grace and dignity. Her manner is characterized by a repose amounting almost to languor.*]

MISS PINSENT [*taking from the writ-g-table the paper upon which she had en writing and presenting it to* IRIS]. he arrangement of the couples at din-r.

[IRIS *slips the paper into her bodice, and* MISS PINSENT *withdraws, passing through the further room.*]

IRIS [*glancing into the further room, assure herself that she and* KANE *are one, then indicating the doors in the arer room*]. Is there a draught?

[*He closes the doors while she seats herself upon the ottoman.*]

IRIS. I want to talk to you, Archie, ncerning a young man in whom I am ghtly interested.

KANE [*sitting, facing her, upon the indow-stool*]. Oh yes.

IRIS. A Mr. Trenwith.

KANE. Do I know him?

IRIS. You may have met him; he has en about this season a great deal. rely I introduced him to you one ght during "La Bohème"?

KANE. Oh, is he the good-looking boy have seen in your box in the opera veral times recently?

IRIS. Two or three times.

KANE. His name has escaped me. And e was at Hurlingham with you on Sat-day, wasn't he?

IRIS. More with the Littledales than ith me. I gave him a lift down. He's ite poor, you know.

KANE. Really? He must have friends — the Littledales, for example.

IRIS. Women-friends who ask him to parties. They are of no use when even a cab-fare is a consideration. It occurred to me that you might be inclined to exert your influence in some direction or another in his behalf.

KANE. What's his age?

IRIS. Twenty-eight, I am afraid.

KANE. Whew! Ever done anything?

IRIS. He has tried many things.

KANE [*ominously*]. H'm!

IRIS. His great misfortune was being ploughed for the army. That was a thousand pities. Lately he has been reading for the bar; but he finds he has no taste for law. His ear for music is wonderful, and he draws cleverly in pastel.

KANE. The failures in life are masters of the minor talents.

IRIS [*in gentle reproof*]. Hush! And now his only relative with money and position — an uncle who is an arch-deacon — has become disheartened. You would expect an archdeacon to be sympathetic and patient, would you not?

KANE. Beyond a certain point, I would not.

IRIS. You are too cynical. At any rate, this uncle offers him a few hundred pounds on the understanding that he goes out to a cattle-ranch in British Columbia — a dreadful place, a sort of genteel Siberia. I am so grieved for the boy.

KANE. A difficult case.

IRIS. Don't say that.

KANE. He belongs to a large class; he is a young gentleman to whom it is absolutely essential that somebody should bequeath five-thousand-a-year.

IRIS. You will jest, Archie.

KANE. My dear Iris, what career is there, apart from the criminal, for engaging but impecunious incapacity? In its usual course, it begins with a beggarly secretaryship, passes through the intermediate stages of a precarious interest in a wine business and a disastrous association with the Turf and the Stock Exchange, and ends with the selling, on

commission, of an obsolete atlas or an unwieldy bible.

IRIS [*shudderingly*]. Terrible!

KANE. Will you follow my advice?

IRIS [*with a sigh of discontent*]. Oh!

KANE. Back up the archdeacon. Urge the young man to clear out without delay.

[*She rises and moves to the fireplace, where she stands looking down upon the flowers.*]

KANE [*rising with her*]. I appear extremely disagreeable.

IRIS. No, no.

KANE [*strolling over to the writing-table and examining a photograph which he finds there*]. This is Mr. Trenwith, is it not?

IRIS [*after a glance in his direction, sitting upon the settee facing the fireplace*]. Yes.

KANE [*replacing the photograph and approaching her*]. Shall I bore you by offering a little further counsel?

IRIS. You are very good.

KANE [*sitting on the ottoman*]. Iris, a woman in your position can't be too cautious.

IRIS. Cautious?

KANE. I don't want to disturb you by recalling the terms of poor George's will. At the same time—

IRIS [*turning to him*]. My dear Archie, nothing that *you* can say upon the subject will disturb me. The threats of that will seem to me to be weaved into the decorations of my walls. I construe them daily, almost hourly. [*Closing her eyes as she recites.*] "You forfeit all interest in your late husband's estate by re-marrying." I tread them into my carpets. [*As before.*] "In such an event the whole source of your income passes to others." The street-music makes a lilt of them. "You have no separate estate; wed again and you cease to be of independent means." When a stranger is presented to me, I divine his thoughts instantly. "Why, you are the woman," he remarks to himself, "who loses her money by re-marrying." [*Reclining upon a pillow with a faint attempt at a laugh.*] Ha! For the thousandth time, why are such provisions made, can you tell me?

KANE. They are designed primarily, I hope, to protect the widow—

IRIS. To protect her!

KANE. From unscrupulous men, from fortune-hunters. In the present instance, for example, it is only fair to assume that your husband, knowing how greatly your happiness depends upon personal comfort, was actuated solely by a desire to safeguard you.

IRIS. Ah, this safeguarding of women! Its effects may be humiliating, cruel.

KANE. H'm! Upon one of its effects, as concerning yourself, I should like to lay particular stress. May I be perfectly frank?

IRIS. Do.

KANE. Allow me to remind you, then, that a lady circumstanced as you are—still youthful, beautiful—

IRIS [*touching his sleeve gently*]. Sssh!

KANE. Who is seen constantly in the company of a young man whom she could not dream of marrying, subjects herself inevitably to a considerable amount of ill-natured criticism.

[*She raises herself, looking at him.*]

KANE. Criticism — conjecture — scandal.

IRIS [*after a brief pause*]. I didn't think you meant that. Ah, thanks.

[*She leaves the settee, showing signs of discomposure.*]

KANE [*standing before her*]. I have completely spoilt your enjoyment of your little dinner-party.

IRIS [*giving him her hand*]. Dear friend. This is the advantage of employing a fashionable solicitor, one whose practice has its roots in the gay parterres of Society. I get the gossip of the boudoir at first hand.

KANE [*deprecatingly*]. My object—

IRIS [*sweetly*]. Ah, I am infinitely obliged. [*Hesitatingly.*] But—Archie—

KANE. Yes?

IRIS [*her head averted*]. You don't believe, evidently, that I am capable of throwing selfish considerations to the winds—marrying a poor man—?

KANE. You!

IRIS [*sitting upon the window-stool*]. know; the last woman on earth, you ould say, who would find courage for ich an act.

KANE. Are you joking?

IRIS. Ha!

KANE. *You* marry a poor man; you ith your utter disregard for the value f money! Why, luxury to you is the lt of life, my dear Iris. Great heav- ns!

IRIS [*weakly*]. I try to do a little ood with my money, too, Archie.

KANE. An indiscriminate sovereign to beggar where a shilling would suffice; ree times his fare to every cabman—

IRIS. Oh, don't scold me!

KANE. Not I. I gave that up long nce. You were sent into the world so onstituted.

IRIS [*smilingly*]. So afflicted. You re right, Archie—the step would be reposterous.

KANE [*raising his hands*]. Ho!

IRIS [*wistfully*]. Only I should like to ink that I don't shrink from it out f sheer worldliness and cowardice. I ould like to think—tssh! [*Rising.*] s you observe, one is sent into the orld shaped this way or that. [*Produc- ng* MISS PINSENT'S *memorandum and eferring to it.*] Will you take Fanny ylvain in to dinner?

KANE. Charmed. Who are your uests?

IRIS. Fanny and a little niece of hers hom she has taken under her wing, ear Croker, the Wynnings—

KANE. Delightful.

IRIS [*walking away from him, to avoid he embarrassment of meeting his eye*]. nd Mr. Trenwith. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, nd Frederick Maldonado.

KANE. Maldonado!

IRIS. Yes.

KANE. May I say I'm glad? The round is healed, then?

IRIS. He writes begging me to include im again in my dinner-parties. Poor Maldo!

[*She is standing beside the writing-table. From a drawer she takes out a ring-case and produces a tiny ring.*]

KANE. What's that?

IRIS [*slipping the ring on to her finger and displaying it*]. A token. He gave it to me when he—at the time—telling me that, if ever I relented, I had only to return it to him without a word and, no matter what part of the globe it found him in, he would come to me on wings.

KANE. The plumage is golden, in his case, Iris.

IRIS. Yes. [*Closing her eyes for a moment.*] But I couldn't, Archie. [*Removing the ring from her finger thoughtfully.*] Yet I've been on the point of sending this to him more than once during the past month.

KANE. You have?

IRIS [*mechanically replacing the ring in its drawer.*] As a way out of my perplexity.

[*The double-doors are thrown open and a servant announces* "Miss Sylvain and Miss Vyse." IRIS *advances to greet* FANNY SYLVAIN, *who enters with* AUREA. FANNY *is a bright, attractive woman of thirty,* AUREA *a frank-looking girl still in her teens.* FANNY *and* IRIS *kiss affectionately.*]

IRIS. Dear Fanny!

FANNY. Dear Iris! [*Presenting* AUREA.] My niece, Aurea.

IRIS [*advancing to* AUREA]. Ah!

FANNY [*shaking hands with* KANE]. Well, Archie!

KANE [*talking to her apart*]. How are you, Fanny? I've bad news for you.

FANNY [*clutching his arm*]. No.

KANE. I am to take you in to dinner.

FANNY [*faintly*]. Brute! I thought you were going to tell me that some of my investments have gone wrong.

KANE. Ha, ha, ha!

FANNY [*in an eager whisper*]. You are still doing well for me, Archie?

[MISS PINSENT *has reappeared in the further room; she now joins* FANNY *and* KANE, *shaking hands with the former.*]

IRIS [*with* AUREA, *by the settee on the left*]. And so this is your first dinner-party, Aurea?

AUREA. Of a formal kind.

IRIS [*smiling*]. A few old friends gathered together for the last time this season.

AUREA. Anyway, it is sweet of you to include me.

[COLONEL *and* MRS. WYNNING *are announced.* WYNNING *is a soldierly man of fifty-five, his wife a pleasant-looking lady much his junior.*]

IRIS [*shaking hands with the* WYNNINGS]. How do you do? How do you do?

WYNNING. How are you?

IRIS [*to both*]. Were you riding in the Park this morning?

MRS. WYNNING. Jack was; I have lumbago.

IRIS. That is very painful, is it not?

WYNNING [*with disgust*]. When I was a boy only servants had it. By Jove, these are levelling days with a vengeance! [*Shaking hands with* FANNY, *who has come to* MRS. WYNNING.] How you, Miss Sylvain? [*Seeing* KANE.] Hullo, Kane! [*Shaking hands with* MISS PINSENT.] How you?

MRS. WYNNING [*greeting* MISS PINSENT]. How do you do?

[MRS. WYNNING, MISS PINSENT, *and* KANE, *in one group, and* COLONEL WYNNING *and* IRIS, *forming another, talk together on the right, while* FANNY *joins* AUREA, *who is now seated upon the settee on the left.*]

FANNY [*to* AUREA]. Well, are you disappointed?

AUREA. She is adorable!

FANNY [*sitting, facing* AUREA, *upon the window-stool — triumphantly*]. Ah!

AUREA. When did you and she first know each other, aunt?

FANNY. When she was fourteen. We were at school together. Even then there wasn't a girl who wouldn't have sold her little white soul for a caress from Iris. And the spell she casts never weakens. Here am I, a woman of thirty, and I believe she is more attractive to me than ever.

AUREA. Of course she'll marry again; she must.

FANNY. She has been pestered to distraction ever since she discarded her mourning.

AUREA [*eagerly*]. Tell me, are any of the men dining here this evening in love with her?

FANNY. Some of them are, or were. [*Glancing in the direction of the* WYNNINGS.] Colonel Wynning married that amiable creature over there in despair at having been refused three times.

AUREA [*awe-stricken*]. Does his wife know it?

FANNY. Certainly; and feels honored, as she ought.

[*A servant announces* "Mr. Harrington," *and* CROKER HARRINGTON, *a dapper but exceedingly ugly little man of five-and-thirty, enters gaily.*]

IRIS [*welcoming him*]. So pleased to see you, Croker.

CROKER [*kissing her hand gallantly*]. Dear lady! [*Discovering* FANNY.] Ah! those alabaster shoulders can belong but to one person.

FANNY [*giving him her left hand, which he presses to his bosom*]. I hate you; you didn't come to the bazaar yesterday.

CROKER. I did better; I told the richest man I know to go there.

FANNY. Freddy Maldonado? He never turned up.

CROKER. The traitor! My fingers shall be at his throat directly he appears. [*To* IRIS.] He's to be here to-night?

IRIS. Yes.

[*He joins those on the right and is received joyously.* IRIS *exchanges a few words with* FANNY *and* AUREA, *and then, producing* MISS PINSENT'S *memorandum, goes to* CROKER.]

AUREA [*to* FANNY]. I hope that plain little gentleman has never dared —

FANNY. Mr. Harrington? Oh, yes, Croker Harrington has dared in his time.

AUREA. No!

FANNY. He laughs openly at his repeated failures. He laughs till he cries, he says, but I suspect the laughter has not always accompanied the tears. Dear Croker! However, he is now resigned to his position.

AUREA. His position?

FANNY. He declares he wonders why the Inland Revenue people don't fine Iris for omitting to take out a dog-license for him.

AUREA [*tenderly*]. Poor little man! Still, he is so exceedingly ugly.

FANNY. The most sensible men in the world, my dear.

AUREA. The ugly ones?

FANNY. The vainest of them confide the truth to themselves at least once a day, while shaving.

[FREDERICK MALDONADO *is announced. He enters — a tall, massive man of about forty, with brown hair and beard, handsome according to the Jewish type, somewhat ebullient in manner, his figure already tending to corpulency.*]

IRIS [*giving him her hand, with perfect dignity*]. You have been too long a stranger, Maldo. Welcome!

MALDONADO [*softly*]. Maldo — my old diminutive. Time is effaced by your use of it. [*Shaking hands with* FANNY.] Fanny —

FANNY. You didn't patronize the bazaar yesterday, Frederick.

MALDONADO. Sincere regrets. I found it impossible to get away from the City. [*Greeting* CROKER *and* KANE.] My dear Croker! Archie, my good friend!

IRIS [*presenting him to the* WYNNINGS]. Mrs. Wynning, let me introduce Mr. Frederick Maldonado. Colonel Wynning —

[*He bows to them and shakes hands with* MISS PINSENT.]

AUREA [*to* FANNY]. Who is that?

FANNY. Frederick, one of the great Maldonado family.

AUREA. Great?

FANNY. Well, not great — big; big financiers.

AUREA. Foreign?

FANNY. The grandfather was a Jew tradesman in Madrid who broke and went out to South America. He made a fortune in tobacco in Havannah and afterwards married an Englishwoman. Since then our public schools have been favored with the education of the male Maldonados. They're reckoned among the three leading groups of financiers in Europe.

AUREA. What is a financier, exactly?

FANNY. A financier? Oh, a pawnbroker with imagination.

AUREA. Aunt! And is *he* in love with — ?

FANNY [*to* KANE, *who at this moment appears at her side*]. Ah! we are talking about *her*. How ethereal she looks this evening! My niece, Archie — [*to* AUREA] Mr. Kane.

[KANE *remains with them, talking. A servant announces,* "Mr. Laurence Trenwith," *and* LAURENCE, *a handsome, stalwart, but still boyish young man, enters.* IRIS *advances to meet him; her lips form the words of a welcome; they shake hands silently.*]

IRIS [*In a low, level voice*]. You know many who are here, I think. [*Moving away to the right, he following.*] You have met Mrs. Wynning? No? [*Presenting* LAURENCE.] Mr. Trenwith. Colonel Wynning. Mr. Harrington I am sure you know. Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

LAURENCE [*shaking hands with* MISS PINSENT *after bowing to the others*]. How do you do?

FANNY [*who has risen — to* KANE, *in a whisper*]. Archie, thank goodness she starts for Switzerland on Saturday!

KANE [*to* FANNY, *with a nod*]. H'm.

[*A* SERVANT *enters.*]

SERVANT. Dinner is served.

[*The* SERVANT *retires.* IRIS *brings* LAURENCE *over to the left.*]

KANE [*shaking hands with him*]. How do you do?

FANNY [*shaking hands with him*]. How are you, Mr. Trenwith?

[FANNY *and* KANE *move away.*]

IRIS [*presenting* LAURENCE *to* AUREA]. Mr. Trenwith — Miss Vyse. [*To* LAURENCE.] Will you take Miss Vyse?

LAURENCE. With great pleasure.

IRIS [*in the center of the room*]. Croker, please play host and go first with Mrs. Wynning.

[CROKER *gives his arm to* MRS. WYNNING *and they pass out.* COLONEL WYNNING, *after a polite offer of*

precedence to KANE *and* FANNY, *follows with* MISS PINSENT. FANNY *and* KANE *go next, then* LAURENCE *and* AUREA. *To* MALDONADO'S *surprise,* IRIS *stands immovable, looking into space*].

MALDONADO [*proffering his arm*]. I am to have the honor — ?

[*Suddenly, with a gleam of resolution in her eyes, she moves to the writing-table and again produces* MALDONADO'S *ring. She offers it to him.*]

MALDONADO [*receiving it incredulously*]. My ring!

IRIS. The token, Maldo.

MALDONADO. Iris — ? [*Intensely.*] Iris!

IRIS. Hush! [*Passing him, then turning and placing her arm in his quite collectedly.*] Have you been abroad lately? I read of your being in Vienna in the spring —

[*The curtain falls as they go out. It rises again almost instantly, showing the window-blinds lowered and the rooms brilliantly lighted. In the conservatory little lamps glitter among the palms and flowers.* IRIS *and* MRS. WYNNING *occupy the settee in the center;* FANNY *is in the chair on their right.* MISS PINSENT *is at the piano, playing the final bars of a nocturne of Chopin, while* AUREA *sits near her turning over some music. The men enter* — COLONEL WYNNING *and* KANE *appearing first;* MALDONADO, CROKER, *and* LAURENCE *following.* IRIS *rises and motions* KANE *to withdraw with her from the rest.* MALDONADO *places himself beside* MRS. WYNNING; CROKER, *standing facing them, takes part in their talk.* WYNNING *and* FANNY *seat themselves on the settee under the palm on the right;* LAURENCE *joins* AUREA *and* MISS PINSENT *at the piano.*

IRIS [*standing by the settee on the left, speaking in a low voice*]. Archie —

KANE. Yes?

IRIS. You need be under no apprehension concerning me. I have done it.

KANE. You have done what?

IRIS. Ended my perplexity. I have told Frederick Maldonado I will marry him.

KANE. Iris!

IRIS. Not a word, if you please, to anybody. I will not have it announced till after I have left town.

KANE. Accept my congratulations. What made you form this resolution so suddenly, may I ask?

IRIS. I felt the sensation of stumbling, that I must snatch at something tangible. [*Closing her eyes.*] I am glad.

KANE. I hope it is for your happiness.

IRIS. It is for my safety. There is now no risk of further scandal should Mr. Trenwith decide to remain in England.

KANE [*approvingly*]. Good!

IRIS. On the other hand, if he migrates to British Columbia, I stifle the temptation to play housewife among the pots and pans of his poor little log-hut. I am secure either way.

KANE. Whew! Then you did entertain the idea seriously?

IRIS [*simply*]. I have been miserably perplexed.

[MISS PINSENT *plays some snatches of music lightly.* CROKER *approaches* IRIS *and* KANE.]

CROKER. My dear Iris, what a delightful dinner you have given us!

KANE. Your dinners are always charming.

IRIS [*sitting upon the settee*]. My guests are always charming.

[KANE *moves away, joining* WYNNING *and* FANNY. WYNNING *yields his place to* KANE *and ultimately sits with* AUREA *under the palm in the further room.*]

CROKER [*sitting facing* IRIS, *his tone changing slightly*]. Divinity, what's the matter with you to-night?

IRIS. The matter?

CROKER. Something disturbs you, distresses you.

IRIS [*playfully*]. How do I show it, Faithful One?

CROKER [*in the same spirit*]. In your lustrous and never-to-be-forgotten eyes.

IRIS [*beating a pillow and nestling in it*]. Ha! I am simply dog-weary. It has been a hard season for your poor Divinity. Oh, how I am longing for my

month among the mountains and my sun-bath at Cadenabbia!

CROKER. You drop down to the lakes, then, after St. Moritz?

IRIS. Yes, I am renting the Villa Prigno and its staff of servants from its owner, Mrs. Van Reisler, for a few weeks.

CROKER. When are you off?

IRIS. On Saturday. This is farewell.

CROKER. I picture the caravan; the fair Pinsent, your courier, your maid, your fruit, your flowers, your birds — no, not those troublesome birds.

IRIS. You know I never move anywhere without my birds. Are you coming to Switzerland this year?

CROKER [*almost surlily, looking away*]. No. Perhaps. [*Softening.*] Of course I am. I am one of your human birds, Divinity.

IRIS. One of my great, kind human birds, that fly after me wheresoever I go.

CROKER [*bitterly*]. That fly, yes — and yet are caged.

IRIS [*reprovingly*]. Hush! Croker!

CROKER. I beg your pardon. It slipped out.

IRIS. Ah, I'll not be vexed with you.

CROKER [*remorsefully*]. I am continually breaking my promise. Some day you'll tire of me and send me about my business.

IRIS. Never. [*Bending towards him.*] Faithful One, do you think I could afford to lose your true friendship, your ceaseless solicitude, your — ?

[*She sees* LAURENCE — *who is now standing at the writing-table, waiting for an opportunity of approaching her — falters and breaks off.*]

IRIS [*in an altered tone*]. Croker, ask Kate to play my favourite mazurka — will you?

CROKER [*rising*]. Certainly.

[*He delivers his message to* MISS PINSENT, *remaining by her side while she plays. With a look,* IRIS *draws* LAURENCE *to her. As he advances she changes her place from the settee to the window-stool.*]

LAURENCE [*standing beside her, speaking in a low voice*]. This is the first opportunity I have had of a word with you.

IRIS. Yes.

LAURENCE. I have something to tell you. May I — ?

[*She motions him to the settee.*]

LAURENCE [*sitting*]. I have accepted my uncle's proposal.

IRIS [*unemotionally*]. You have?

LAURENCE. There is nothing for it but that, nothing that I can hit upon. I go down to Rapley, to talk matters over with the old man, to-morrow.

IRIS. Oh, yes.

LAURENCE. So this may be the last time we shall ever meet; unless you — oh, I feel how presumptuous I am to allude to it again!

IRIS. Unless I — ?

LAURENCE. Could, after all, bring yourself to share my rough lot with me. A mad, selfish idea, I know. Feelings like mine make one mad.

IRIS. Please! A mad idea, indeed.

LAURENCE [*with a break in his voice*]. It's good-bye, then.

IRIS. When will you be back from Rapley?

LAURENCE. I sha'n't come back; my uncle insists upon my spending my remaining few hours with him. Then I shall go straight to Liverpool.

IRIS. You said — ?

LAURENCE. On the thirtieth — the day you start for Switzerland, I hear?

[*She assents dumbly.*]

LAURENCE [*appealingly*]. Let me stay behind a few moments to-night after your friends have left.

IRIS. I am sorry; Mr. Maldonado has already made a similar request.

LAURENCE. Oh, but you can excuse yourself to him?

IRIS. I — I fear not.

LAURENCE. Forgive me. I thought, this being the end of our — [*rising*] — never mind.

[*She rises with him. They face one another.*]

LAURENCE. I shall write to you from Rapley, if I may; and send you a wire from Liverpool. And when I get to Chilcoten — River Ranch, Chilcoten, British Columbia — I'll — would once a month be too often? Oh, how happy I've been!

[*She gives a quick glance round, conscious of a general movement, and sees that her guests are preparing to depart.* WYNNING *has joined* MRS. WYNNING.]

IRIS [*hastily but composedly, in a low voice*]. Laurence—

LAURENCE. Yes.

IRIS. Return in about an hour's time. Be outside the house, on the other side of the way. Watch the door—

[*The* WYNNINGS *come to her.*]

IRIS [*turning to* MRS. WYNNING]. Must you—?

MRS. WYNNING. We have to go on.

WYNNING [*cheerfully*]. Three o'clock in the morning again for us. This week sees the last of it, thank God.

MRS. WYNNING. When one has lumbago one may as well keep upright as not.

IRIS. I ought to follow you, but I am too indolent to-night.

MRS. WYNNING [*kissing her*]. It has been so pleasant.

WYNNING [*shaking hands*]. Charming.

[*They shake hands with the rest—who are engaged in bidding each other good-night—and withdraw,* MISS PINSENT *accompanying them.*]

IRIS [*to* FANNY, *who comes to her with* AUREA]. You too, Fanny?

FANNY. Only to the Chadwicks, for the sake of this girl, and then to by-by. [*Kissing her on both cheeks.*] Your dinner-table looked superb.

AUREA. Do let me thank you, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

IRIS [*to* AUREA]. Well—?

AUREA [*in answer*]. Oh, I should like to dine out every night of my life!

IRIS. Ha!

AUREA. If I could always watch your face through the flowers.

[IRIS *kisses her and walks with them to the door.*]

FANNY. Will you be at home at tea-time to-morrow?

IRIS. To you, Fanny. *Au revoir!*

[*They depart as* CROKER *approaches her.*]

IRIS. Are you for gaieties, Croker?

CROKER. Not I. [*Kissing her hand.*] The last act of "Messaline" and a glance at the telegrams at the club will see me through. [*In the doorway.*] I shall be on the platform at Victoria.

IRIS [*gratefully*]. No, no; you mustn't trouble.

CROKER [*with a quick look into her face*]. Trouble! good heavens!

[*He disappears.*]

LAURENCE [*formally as he shakes hands with her*]. Thank you for a most delightful evening.

IRIS. So nice of you to come.

LAURENCE. Good-night.

IRIS. Good-night. [*He withdraws.*]

KANE [*shaking hands with her*]. Shall we meet again before you run away?

IRIS. Hardly.

KANE. Well— a pleasant holiday!

IRIS. And to you, Archie.

KANE [*pausing in the doorway, dropping his voice*]. Once more, congratulations.

IRIS. Thanks.

[*He goes. She closes the door and turns, to find herself in* MALDONADO'S *arms.*]

IRIS. Ah, no!

MALDONADO. At last!

IRIS. Oh!

MALDONADO. Sweetest!

IRIS. Maldo! [*Freeing herself with a gesture of repugnance.*] Maldo!

[*She brushes past him, and stands, greatly ruffled, by the chair beside the writing-table. He regards her silently for a moment, puzzled.*]

MALDONADO [*after a silence*]. Oh, pardon me, my dear. The stored-up feelings of—a life-time, it seems—! It would be an exceedingly poor compliment to you were I less ardent.

[*She takes a bottle of salts from the writing-table and drops into the chair.*]

IRIS. I—I am tired, Maldo.

MALDONADO [*brightening*]. Ah, naturally; and I most inconsiderate. [*Coming to the back of her chair.*] I was rough—savage. A woman should always find repose on the breast of her lover. [*Bending over her.*] Let me prove to you how gentle I can be.

IRIS. Er—it is late, Maldo.

MALDONADO [*glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece*]. Barely eleven. [*Turning to her.*] Late! [*Twisting his beard, thoughtfully.*] You who never leave the opera till the final bar is played — ! [*Placing himself between her chair and the writing-table.*] But I won't plague you further. [*Sitting upon the edge of the table and inclining his body towards her.*] I only ask you to grant me one favor before you dismiss me to-night.

IRIS. Favor?

MALDONADO. Bestow upon me the title I have coveted so long. It is comprised in a single word. The faintest movement of those beautiful, still lips will suffice. You have but to whisper it to send me through the streets in air. Whisper!

IRIS. What?

MALDONADO. I am your beloved, am I not? Simply call me — Beloved.

IRIS. We — we are not boy and girl, Maldo.

MALDONADO. Boy! I! no. [*His eyes glowering.*] A boy is not scorched-up, body and soul, by such a passion as you inspire me with.

[*She rises, turning from him.*]

MALDONADO [*also rising, apologetically*]. Ah, I scare you again! You'll think me a hot-blooded tyrant. Don't fear; it is merely for the moment — the suddenness of my delight — ! Besides, you must make some small allowance for me; we Maldonados are not yet wholly English in our ways. You shall complete my education. We'll begin the course of instruction at once — begin by my promptly leaving you to your slumbers. [*Taking her hand and crumpling it fondly.*] There! was there ever a more docile pupil? [*In an outburst, impulsively pressing her hand to his lips and covering it with passionate kisses.*] Ah, sweetest, be kind! melt! be warm! be warm!

IRIS [*regaining possession of her hand*]. Maldo — listen! — Maldo — I — I am dreadfully sorry. What I tell you now I ought to have told you before returning your ring — your token. Maldo, I haven't the love for you a woman should have for the man who is to be her husband; in that respect I am as you have always known me. But I will try to do my duty faithfully as mistress of your house, if that will satisfy you. I can promise no more, but I will do my duty — strictly and honorably, Maldo, strictly and honorably.

[*She moves away to the center. He approaches her slowly.*]

MALDONADO [*at her side, his softness gone, speaking in a harsh, grating voice — swallowing an oath.*] By — ! I should scarcely have thought it possible! Yes, you positively deceived me — the astute Freddy Maldonado! You've had me in a fool's paradise for nearly three hours.

IRIS. Deceived —

MALDONADO. What an ass! I really imagined — for three mortal hours! — that it was reserved for me to escape the proverbial fate of the millionaire where the love of woman is concerned!

IRIS [*in protest*]. Maldo!

MALDONADO [*sharply*]. Why are you marrying me, then? Eh? Why are you prepared to marry me?

IRIS. You are very good, Maldo, very generous —

MALDONADO. Ah, yes.

IRIS. Amiability itself —

MALDONADO. Quite so.

IRIS. There is no man for whom I have sincerer respect; none, Maldo, none.

MALDONADO. Yes, yes; all that. But I assume that the qualities you enumerate, admirable as they are, would hardly suffice to induce you to resign your own comfortable fortune were I not able to offer you a pretty solid exchange.

IRIS. A woman, at such a crisis of her life, is swayed by many considerations, of course, Maldo. I am past the romantic age. You — you must think what you please; I cannot defend myself.

[*She sits upon the ottoman stonily. Leaving her, he walks about the room giving vent to short outbursts of ironical laughter. Ultimately he flings himself on to the settee on the left.*]

MALDONADO. Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho! [*His*

laughter dying out — bitterly.] Why, I suppose I ought to be profoundly grateful for your candor. The generality of women — ha, ha! And better now than subsequent to marriage! And, after all, you give yourself to me — give yourself in a fashion; in the only fashion, it may be — I must console myself with that — in the only fashion in which your temperament allows you to yield yourself. Come, I can't lose you utterly, my dear. I'll be a philosopher and say Thanks. Thanks. [*Returning to her side.*] Thanks.

IRIS [*in a murmur*]. Thanks, Maldo.

MALDONADO [*grimly*]. It's a bargain, then? You to be mine; as much mine as the Velasquez, the Raphael, hanging on my walls — mine, at least to gaze at, mine to keep from others?

[*Her head droops in acquiescence.*]

MALDONADO [*gradually regaining some part of his good-humor*]. And in return I promise you that you shall be one of the most envied women in Europe. Oh, you shall attain your ambition; you shall realize what wealth is, steep yourself in it to your heart's content!

IRIS [*rising, penitently*]. Maldo!

MALDONADO. Tsch, my dear! I'll not reproach you. You are as God made women, and I — I am a millionaire. [*After a pause, during which she plays with her handkerchief helplessly.*] Well, I'll be gone. I fear I've gravely imperilled my character for amiability.

IRIS. Oh — ! [*Giving him her hand.*] Maldo —

MALDONADO. Eh?

IRIS. Perhaps — perhaps, as the years grow, it may become different between us.

MALDONADO [*gripping her hand*]. Iris!

IRIS [*hastily*]. Good-night.

MALDONADO [*devouring her with his eyes*]. My — my queen! [*Drawing a deep breath.*] I take my luck!

[*He releases her, and she goes to the bell beside the fireplace and rings it.*]

MALDONADO [*at the door*]. Will you be in to me in the morning?

IRIS. Yes.

MALDONADO. A thousand apologies for keeping you up. Good-night.

IRIS. Good-night, Maldo.

[*He departs. With a cry, half of pain, half of weariness, she throws herself full-length upon the settee, and the curtain falls. After a brief pause it rises, disclosing the rooms empty and in darkness, and the window-shutters and the shutters of the conservatory doors closed and barred. A key turns in its lock and one of the double-doors is opened gently, and* IRIS *enters, followed by* LAURENCE TRENWITH. *She motions him to pass her, and carefully closes the door. Then she switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table on the left and, silently and impassively, seats herself upon the window-stool. Having deposited his hat and overcoat upon the settee on the right, he comes to her and, throwing himself upon his knees before her, clasps her waist. She remains statue-like, her arms hanging by her side, looking down upon him with fixed eyes.*]

LAURENCE. I can't help it! Pity me! Forgive me for being so daring. Remember, in the future I have to live upon my recollection of you — my recollection of how near I have been to you. To-night will stand out more distinctly than all the rest! You'll kiss me to-night, won't you — let me kiss you! [*She raises her hands to shield her face.*] For once, just for once! Ah, you'll not allow me to go without a kiss at parting! Picture me in my solitary little log-hut, alone after the day's work — twelve miles away from the nearest house, from the nearest companionable creature — and think what the memory of a single kiss will always mean to me. Oh, don't hide your face! Are you angry? Remove your hands! You *are* angry. I won't kiss you, then; I won't try to kiss you.

[*He attempts to uncover her face, whereupon she rises. He rises with her. There is silence between them for a while.*]

IRIS [*at length, controlling herself with an effort*]. Laurence — my poor

friend—I have promised to marry Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE [*almost inaudibly*]. What!

IRIS. Maldonado.

LAURENCE [*dully*]. When—?

IRIS. When did I make the promise?

LAURENCE. Y—yes.

IRIS. To-night—last night, that is. It is past twelve, isn't it?

LAURENCE. Yes.

[*He turns from her unsteadily and sinks upon the ottoman, his head bowed, his shoulders shaking convulsively.*]

IRIS [*at his side*]. Don't! don't! be strong! What difference can it make?

LAURENCE. To me? None, I suppose. Oh, yes, yes, all the difference.

IRIS. How—?

LAURENCE. There would have been the hope. There would have been the hope.

IRIS. Hope?

LAURENCE [*mastering his emotion, and looking up at her*]. In spite of everything, I should have gone away with the hope that, some day, if I prosper, you would bid me come home to fetch you. And now—Mr. Maldonado. [*Rising.*] I beg your pardon; I ought to offer you my—

IRIS. Thank you.

LAURENCE [*gazing at her*]. You and Mr. Maldonado! I should hardly have—[*checking himself.*] I trust you will be extremely—

[*He fetches his hat and coat and returns to her.*]

LAURENCE [*brokenly*]. Of course, under the altered circumstances I won't think of troubling you with letters.

IRIS. Perhaps it would be as well that you should not write, for a time at least. I shall never cease to be interested in your career. [*Losing some of her composure.*] Oh, you might have disguised it more thoroughly!

LAURENCE. Disguised—?

IRIS. Your astonishment at my marrying Mr. Maldonado. [*Feebly.*] He has loved me—he asked me to be his wife two years ago. And to-night I—quite suddenly— [*in an altered tone*]. Do you know that you and I were beginning to be the subject of tittle-tattle?

LAURENCE. You and I?

IRIS. Gossip.

LAURENCE [*indignantly*]. Oh!

IRIS. Scandal.

LAURENCE. How dare people? Good heavens! to think I have brought this upon you! What in infamous world!

[*She shrugs her shoulders, smiling miserably.*]

LAURENCE. Oh—! [*Going to the mantelpiece and leaning upon it.*] Oh, it's a dastardly world!

IRIS. I didn't mean to add to your unhappiness. I only wished you to understand exactly what has occurred.

LAURENCE [*turning to her*]. But now I am going away. That in itself will stop evil tongues. There is no necessity now for you to take this step, if you are taking it merely to stop scandal.

[*She sits, silently, upon the ottoman. Throwing his hat and coat aside, he kneels upon the settee and, bending over it, speaks almost into her ear.*]

LAURENCE. Don't do this! don't! don't! There's no reason for it. You sha'n't! you shall not!

IRIS. I must.

LAURENCE. Not Maldonado!

IRIS. I must.

LAURENCE. Not the man I met here to-night!

IRIS [*seizing his hands and holding them, in entreaty*]. Laurence—

LAURENCE. What?

IRIS. I am totally unfit for the life you ask me to lead!

LAURENCE. The life—?

IRIS. Your wife—a farmer's wife—mistress of a log-hut—to work with my hands! I dare not!

LAURENCE. Iris—!

IRIS. Out there, here, anywhere, I am not fit to be a poor man's wife.

LAURENCE. Iris—!

IRIS. No, no, no; I will not.

LAURENCE. You are marrying him to save yourself from me!

IRIS [*faintly*]. Oh!

[*Her head drops back until it rests upon the edge of the settee. With a cry he presses a prolonged kiss upon her lips. She rises, her eyes*

closed, her hand pressed tightly upon her mouth.]

LAURENCE [*guiltily*]. You'll despise me for that, always have a contempt for me.

[*After a pause, during which she is quite still, she moves to the writing-table and, seating herself before it, switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table.*]

IRIS [*in a whisper*]. Laurence—

[*She selects a sheet of notepaper and writes, he looking on wonderingly. When she has finished her note she blots it, and hands it to him, and proceeds to address an envelope.*]

IRIS. Read it. What have I said?

LAURENCE [*reading*]. "Forget what has passed between us to-night. It cannot be. I entreat your forgiveness."

[*He returns the paper and she encloses it. Then she rises and, taking some flowers from a vase, moistens the envelope with the wet stalks. Having fastened the letter by pressing it with her handkerchief, she gives it to* LAURENCE.]

IRIS. Let a messenger leave that at Mr. Maldonado's house in Mount Street before nine o'clock.

LAURENCE [*pocketing the letter*]. Iris—!

[*She leaves him, with uncertain steps, and sinks upon the settee facing the fireplace. He follows her.*]

LAURENCE [*standing before her*]. What do you mean?

IRIS [*half rising*]. I—I don't care! Follow me to Switzerland. Be near me—

[*She stretches out her arms to him, and they sit together in an embrace. The curtain falls.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene represents an apartment in a villa standing upon elevated ground running up from the west bank of the Lake of Como. The room, quadrantal in shape, is a spacious and lofty one. Its walls, decorated in slight relief, and its pilasters are of the purest white plaster. On the right-hand side of the room the wall is straight; in it, deeply recessed, are double-doors admitting to a hall; while the circular wall is broken by three vast windows, opening to the floor, at equal distances from each other. Outside these windows runs a balcony, the termination of which, at either end, is out of sight. Beyond the balcony are the tops of the trees—palms, magnolia in blossom, and others—growing in the garden below; and in the distance, under a deep blue sky, lie Bellagio and the juncture of the Lake of Como with that of Lecco. The furniture and hangings of the apartment—in contrast to the lightness of its decorations—are French, of the time of the first Empire. By the further window, which is open, stand a settee and a writing-table and chair. Near the door is a circular table covered with a white tablecloth and partially laid for a meal, and on each side of this table is a chair so placed as to suggest that the meal in preparation is for two persons. A cabinet standing against the wall serves as a sideboard; on it are dishes of fruit, decanters of wine, table-glass, etc., etc. On the other side of the room, by the nearer window, half of which is open, is another table littered with newspapers, magazines and books. On the left-hand side of this table is a settee; on the right a chair; and upon the floor, between the chair and the settee, are a heap of cushions, some loose sheets of music, and a guitar. A piece of sculpture fills the right-hand corner of the room, and some busts on pedestals occupy the spaces between the windows. On the balcony there are two or three chairs in basketwork and, outside the middle window, standing upon the broad ledge of the balustrade, several cages of birds.

The light is that of a brilliantly fine morning in September. The sun enters through the nearer window; the rest of the balcony is in shade.

[*Two* SERVANTS — *a man and a woman — are engaged in laying the table near the doors for déjeuner.* FANNY SYLVAIN *and* AUREA — *dressed for walking — appear on the balcony, at the further window, coming from the right.*

FANNY. Good-morning.

MAN-SERVANT *and* WOMAN-SERVANT. Good-morning, miss.

FANNY [*entering*]. Mrs. Bellamy is out, the gardener tells me.

MAN-SERVANT. Yes, miss. She has gone for a walk to Tremezzo.

FANNY. I wonder I didn't meet her. Alone?

MAN-SERVANT. No, miss; with Mr. Trenwith.

FANNY [*shortly*]. Oh.

MAN-SERVANT. Mr. Trenwith is sketching at Tremezzo, miss.

FANNY [*displaying no further interest*]. Really?

MAN-SERVANT. Mrs. Bellamy breakfasts at twelve, miss, so she can't be long.

FANNY [*taking a magazine from the table on the left and seating herself on the settee by the nearer window*]. I'll wait a little while. [*To* AUREA, *who has followed her into the room.*] We'll wait, Aurea.

AUREA [*sitting on the settee by the further window*]. I could gaze at this prospect for ever, aunt.

[*The* WOMAN-SERVANT *withdraws at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT [*to* FANNY]. Mr. 'Arrington is also waiting for Mrs. Bellamy, miss. I b'lieve you're acquainted with Mr. 'Arrington?

FANNY. Mr. Croker Harrington!

MAN-SERVANT. He came down last night from Promontogno. He's staying at Menaggio.

FANNY [*rising*]. Where is he now?

MAN-SERVANT. He's strolling about the garden, I fancy.

FANNY [*gladly*]. Mr. Harrington has arrived, Aurea.

AUREA. Has he, aunt?

FANNY [*going out at the nearer window and looking down from the balcony into the garden*]. Isn't that he, by the fountain? [*Moving to the further end of the balcony as she calls.*] Croker! Cro — ker! [*Waving her sunshade.*] Croker! [*Re-entering the room.*] How jolly, Aurea — dear Croker!

AUREA [*who is now standing by the table on the left — in a low voice*]. Do you think all this pleases Mrs. Bellamy, aunt?

FANNY. All this —?

AUREA. Her friends chasing her, as it must seem, from place to place while she is on her holiday.

FANNY [*somewhat disconcerted*]. Why, it delights her, naturally.

AUREA. It wouldn't me [*awkwardly*] if I wanted —

FANNY. Wanted — what?

AUREA. Rest — and seclusion.

[*The* WOMAN-SERVANT *reappears, showing in* CROKER HARRINGTON; *then she and her fellow-servant retire.*]

CROKER [*kissing* FANNY'S *hand*]. My dearest Fanny!

FANNY. Croker!

CROKER [*advancing to* AUREA, *and shaking hands with her*]. My dear Miss Vyse! Ladies, your appearance on a day already sufficiently brilliant is overpowering. [*Opening a white umbrella which he is carrying, and holding it before him.*] Remove your eyes from me, I entreat; they rob me of the shade!

FANNY. What a fool you are, Croker! So you've turned up?

CROKER [*shutting his umbrella*]. Last night.

FANNY. You're at Menaggio?

CROKER. You divine my most secret movements — at the Victoria. And you —?

FANNY [*with a jerk of the head towards the right*]. We're at the Belle Vue, Aurea and I.

CROKER. Spick, span, comfortable Belle Vue! [*To* FANNY, *his hand upon his*

heart.] But I daren't trust myself in too close a proximity—

FANNY [*striking him gently with her sunshade*]. Idiot! Have you paid your devotions to our Divinity yet?

CROKER. Not yet; it was too late to do so last night. You see much of her, of course?

FANNY [*constrainedly*]. I've been here only a week. Yes, I see her for a few minutes every day.

CROKER. A few minutes?

FANNY. She's a good deal occupied.

CROKER. Occupied?

FANNY [*dryly*]. Sketching.

CROKER. Sketching!

FANNY. Aurea dear, the sun is off the front of the house. If you keep watch, you might run and meet Iris when she appears.

AUREA [*obediently*]. Yes, aunt.

[*She goes out, at the nearer window, and talks to the birds.* FANNY *crosses over to the window and closes it.*]

FANNY. [*turning to him*]. What were we—?

CROKER. I was about to commit myself to the observation that Iris doesn't sketch.

FANNY. No, but Mr. Trenwith does.

CROKER [*unconcernedly*]. Oh—ah—yes. Is Mr. Trenwith at Cadenabbia?

FANNY. At the Britannia.

CROKER [*in the same spirit*]. H'm, h'm?

FANNY. A few hundred yards from this villa.

[*There is a pause between them, during which he employs himself in idly turning over the newspapers upon the table on the left.*]

FANNY [*seating herself on the settee by the further window*]. You were at St. Moritz during her stay there, you wrote and told me?

CROKER. For a fortnight.

FANNY. Mr. Trenwith happened to be there also, didn't he?

CROKER. Yes.

FANNY [*impatiently*]. He is regularly in her train.

CROKER. Oh, hardly more than I, if it comes to that.

FANNY. But he is young, charming, attractive in every way—

[*He throws his head back and laughs almost too uproariously.*]

FANNY [*jumping up and coming to him penitently*]. I beg your pardon, Croker. You misunderstood me. Oh, be quiet! What I should have said was—one could wish that Miss Pinsent's successor were of another sex. Why was Miss Pinsent given her *congé* just before Iris left London? A pleasant, suitable person for a companion, surely! Wouldn't you consider her so?

CROKER. *I* might consider her so.

FANNY [*moving away*]. Don't be coarse. I had a letter last week from Evelyn Littledale. The Littledales were at St. Moritz, too. [*He nods in assent.*] Everybody was talking, Evelyn says.

CROKER. Talking! What else is there to do at St. Moritz?

FANNY. And here—

CROKER. Here?

FANNY. It is the same here. Everybody is talking.

CROKER. The glass is falling. Two days of rain and the place will be empty.

FANNY. People will carry the topic away with them. [*Leaning upon the back of the chair on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Mary Chadwick writes me from Scotland; *she* mentions it.

CROKER. Pretty, bony, pimply Polly Chadwick!

FANNY. It came to her from London. It has been brought to London already.

CROKER. The only form of luggage that escapes a charge for excess.

FANNY. You are too sententious! [*At the breakfast-table, suddenly.*] Are you breakfasting with Iris?

CROKER [*joining her*]. She doesn't know I've arrived.

FANNY. Because I notice the table is laid for two. [*On his left.*] For mercy's sake, man, do show some signs of animation! You can be sprightly enough at times.

CROKER. My dear Fanny, to what tune would you have me skip?

FANNY. Why, astonishment—aston-

ishment, at least, at our Divinity's extraordinary behavior.

CROKER. Is it extraordinary?

FANNY. Can you find a milder phrase for it? I tell you, Croker, I can't sleep for worrying about Iris. When we were in town, and young Trenwith was fluttering round her, I was in a blue funk lest she should be tempted to marry him and plunge herself into poverty. But now — well, I sometimes catch myself wishing that she would announce her engagement to him. [*Leaving* CROKER *and peering at* AUREA *through the center window*]. My niece, too! I am certain she is beginning to wonder. [*Seating herself by the table on the left.*] What on earth are we to think of it all?

CROKER. Think? That here are two well-intentioned young people with a natural fondness for each other's society. What else, pray, is there to think?

FANNY. Oh, thanks, I appreciate the snub.

CROKER. Best natured of your sex, I intend no snub. Bring me the man who presumes to snub you and I will slay him in your presence. No, no, I would only suggest to those who are disturbing you by their gossip that it is simply abominable that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness. Faugh! why must this dear friend of ours be fastened upon? Cannot she be spared — a refined, delicate creature whose natural pride and dignity queens might envy? Oh, a little spoilt, if you will; petted by those who have the privilege of intimacy with her; luxurious in her habits, a born spendthrift, but never more prodigal — bless her! — than in her charities! I can remember little else to urge against her — except the difficulties of her position, none of her own making. She mustn't re-marry — that is, she may not marry whom she pleases. In heaven's name, is she to be gagged and manacled for that reason? She is still young — yes; yet from the fact of her already having been a wife — brief as was the duration of that experience — she can't be altogether an unwise woman. Is she not to be trusted to give wholesome counsel to a young man without the interruption of a chaperon; is she never to play at mothering — like a sage child with a doll — a male companion belonging to her own generation? And this young fellow, this Trenwith? Is he necessarily an abandoned wretch? I like him. I wish I were in his shoes —, better still, in his skin! I say is youth necessarily designing, necessarily vicious? I'll back it against age; and age isn't all bad, I console myself with believing, as I pull out a gray hair or two every morning. [*Pacing the room.*] Phuh! It nauseates me even to argue the matter. [*Sitting, on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Have you ventured to speak to Iris on the subject?

FANNY. Not yet. I keep putting it off from day to day.

CROKER. Why — feeling as strongly as you do?

FANNY. I suppose I shrink from seeing a pair of placid, gray eyes turn on me with a look of surprise and reproach.

CROKER [*triumphantly*]. Ha!

FANNY. Oh, of course I know they will look so, and leave me to splutter out of my difficulty like a puppy who has been dropped into a pond. Yes, yes, of course, Croker, in my heart I know she is only foolish — foolish — foolish.

CROKER. I won't admit even that; only that other people are malicious — malicious — malicious.

FANNY [*going to him and laying a hand on his shoulder*]. What a friend you are!

CROKER. Is there any other *rôle* for an ugly little devil to play in this world?

FANNY. The friendship of a single man is worth that of a dozen women. [*Uneasily.*] I believe that if our Divinity really behaved as she has been doing in my nightmares —

CROKER [*looking up at her*]. Your nightmares?

FANNY [*avoiding his gaze*]. I believe you'd stick to her even then.

CROKER [*under his breath*]. Good God, yes!

FANNY. Through any disgrace?

CROKER. Till death. My dear Fanny, please don't imagine such impossible contingencies. [*Abruptly.*] And you?

FANNY. Ah, there's the difference between men and women. I should drop quietly away.

CROKER. Would you?

FANNY. Goodness knows, I'm not strait-laced, Croker; but one daren't let one's laces get too slack. [*Sadly.*] Yes, I should simply have to drop away quietly. What an end—!

CROKER [*rising*]. Don't let us talk in this fashion.

FANNY [*rousing herself*]. No, no. [*Recovering her spirits.*] As a matter of fact, your homily has comforted me tremendously—though you did snarl at me like a griffin.

CROKER [*laughing*]. Ha, ha, ha!

FANNY. But you don't object to my whispering just *one* word of warning into that little pink ear of hers, when an opportunity occurs, eh?

CROKER. On the contrary—

AUREA [*looking in at the further window*]. She is coming, aunt.

[AUREA *disappears quickly. One of the caged birds bursts into song.*]

FANNY. Hark!

CROKER [*on the left*]. Eh?

FANNY. Listen to that silly bird. It's the same with me—always has been; my heart thumps—thumps—thumps—whenever she approaches. And with you?

CROKER [*nodding*]. Yes. What is she looking like?

FANNY. Oh, fresher for the soft air of this place—more color.

CROKER. Her paleness is wonderfully becoming, though.

FANNY [*smiling*]. When you met her at St. Moritz, did you notice she had lost some of those little lines we saw last season?

CROKER. They were going. [*Regretfully.*] I missed them. They were nothing but dimples.

FANNY. And her smile — [*Breaking off suddenly and coming to him.*] Croker—

CROKER. Yes?

FANNY [*her troubled manner returning*]. I'll tell you what she looks like—[*irritably*] what a noise that bird makes! I'll tell you; I should describe her as looking exactly like—[*with an uncomfortable laugh*] it's the effect of this enchanted lake, I suppose—

CROKER. Exactly like—?

FANNY [*again avoiding his eye*]. A bride.

[IRIS *enters at the door, her arm through* AUREA'S. *She is dressed in white, and is happier-looking and more girlish than when last seen.* LAURENCE *follows, carrying his sketch-book.*]

IRIS [*uttering a cry of pleasure upon seeing* CROKER]. Ah! [*Kissing* FANNY.] Dear Fanny! [*Advancing to* CROKER *with extended hands.*] Aurea promised me a surprise, but not this!

CROKER [*kissing her hands*]. What are you—the spirit of the lake?

IRIS. No; something warmer to her friends. The lake is deep and cold, and occasionally cruel.

[FANNY *has greeted* LAURENCE *rather distantly; he now comes to* CROKER.]

CROKER [*shaking hands with him cordially*]. How are you, Mr. Trenwith?

LAURENCE [*brightly*]. When did you come down?

CROKER. Yesterday.

IRIS [*to* CROKER]. Mr. Trenwith is staying at the Britannia. He has been kind enough to let me watch him sketching at Tremezzo this morning. [*Removing her hat and veil with* FANNY'S *assistance.*] And you?

CROKER. I'm at Menaggio—the Victoria.

IRIS. A mile away from me. How churlish! [*Laying a hand on* CROKER *and* FANNY.] Still, this is reunion. You'll all breakfast with me, won't you? Mr. Trenwith has already promised. Yes?

FANNY. Certainly, dear.

CROKER [*depositing his hat and umbrella upon the settee on the left*]. Glorious! A hundred affirmatives.

AUREA [*to* IRIS]. Oh, I'm disgusted! I am engaged to lunch with the Bat-

tersbys and to go with them this afternoon, on the steamboat, to the Villa d'Este.

FANNY. Yes, and I too! But they will readily release an old woman.

AUREA [*referring to her watch*]. I ought to be at the hotel now.

FANNY. I'll take Aurea back, make my excuses, and return.

CROKER [*taking up his hat and umbrella*]. Let me be your escort.

FANNY. No, no.

CROKER. I insist. [*To* IRIS.] At what time do you breakfast?

IRIS. It shall be delayed till half-past twelve. [*To* AUREA.] You will come to see me again — to-morrow perhaps?

AUREA [*assenting*]. I shall hate the steamboat, and the Villa d'Este, and the Battersbys — and they're such nice people.

FANNY [*going out with* AUREA]. Half-past twelve, then!

CROKER [*following them*]. With the fiercest of appetites.

FANNY *and* CROKER. *Au revoir!*

[*They depart.*]

IRIS [*pulling the bell-rope which hangs by the door*]. *Au revoir!*

[*The* MAN-SERVANT *appears in the doorway.*]

IRIS [*to the* SERVANT]. Tell François there will be two more persons for *déjeuner*, and to delay it half-an-hour.

MAN-SERVANT. Yes, ma'am.

[*He withdraws, closing the doors.* IRIS *and* LAURENCE *approach each other. They converse in low, tender tones.*]

IRIS [*to* LAURENCE]. We close our *tête-à-tête*. But they are my dearest friends.

LAURENCE. I understand.

IRIS. Others may gossip about me, shut their eyes at me eventually if they choose. But these two — I don't believe the comments occasioned by our being so constantly together will ever deprive me of their fidelity, do you?

LAURENCE [*doubtfully*]. I sometimes fear that Miss Sylvain —

IRIS [*with a gesture of abandonment*]. Ah! [*Drawing still closer to him.*] Anyhow I have what is most precious. [*Indicating the sketch-book which he retains in his hand.*] Show me your morning's work.

LAURENCE [*exhibiting a page deprecatingly*]. There's little to show.

IRIS. For shame! And I was reading intently nearly the whole of the time in order not to distract you.

LAURENCE. True — but my eyes were wandering towards your face nearly the whole of the time.

IRIS. How foolish! Were they? [*In his ear.*] I know they were.

[*With a childlike laugh of pleasure she flings her hat away from her, in the direction of the settee by the further window, and sinks on to the cushions on the left. The hat falls upon the floor; he picks it up.*]

IRIS [*carelessly*]. Oh, my pretty hat! [*Seeing that he is concerned over its trimmings.*] It's of no consequence.

LAURENCE [*placing the hat and his sketch-book upon the writing-table*]. It is one of the hats that came from Paris yesterday.

IRIS [*taking the guitar upon her lap*]. Is it? So it is.

[*She thumbs the guitar. He comes to her slowly, contemplating her with a troubled look.*]

LAURENCE. Dearest —

IRIS. Eh? Where's your mandoline?

LAURENCE. I left it in the garden last night, I'm afraid.

IRIS. Careless person! Send for it.

LAURENCE [*sitting in the chair which is near her*]. Dearest, tell me — have you always been as I have known you?

IRIS. Always — as you have known me —?

LAURENCE. Profuse — extravagant — ?

IRIS. I? Oh, yes, always; from childhood, I've been told. Why? You have asked me something to that effect before, Laurie.

LAURENCE. Forgive me.

IRIS. Yes, it's in my blood, the very core of my nature, I believe.

LAURENCE [*thoughtfully*]. To be lavish — reckless —

IRIS. Reckless? You said extravagant.

LAURENCE. Is there much difference?

IRIS. Between recklessness and mere personal extravagance — indulgence? Oh, yes, indeed, indeed. There is courage in recklessness — blind courage, but courage; an absence of calculation, no thought of self whatever. And recklessness implies energy, determination, of a kind. But I — your poor Iris — ! Do fetch your mandoline.

LAURENCE. No, no; talk about yourself.

IRIS. Your poor, weak, sordid Iris, who must lie in the sun in summer, before the fire in winter, who must wear the choicest lace, the richest furs; whose eyes must never encounter any but the most beautiful objects — languid, slothful, nerveless, incapable almost of effort! Do you remember the story of the poet Thomson, and the peaches? He adored peaches, but was too greedy to await their appearance at table and too indolent to pluck them himself; so he used to stand propped-up against the wall upon which they grew and, with half-closed lids, bite into his beloved fruit as it hung from its tree. [*Plaintively.*] Ha, ha, ha! No image could give you a better notion of my habits and disposition.

LAURENCE. Dearest, you blacken yourself wilfully.

IRIS. Reckless! reckless! Why, were I a reckless woman, Laurie, we should now be man and wife, should we not?

LAURENCE [*in low, earnest tones, bending over her*]. Man and wife.

IRIS [*wistfully, looking into space*]. Man and wife.

LAURENCE. Man and wife! married! no one in the world to look askance at us!

IRIS. Yes, we should have hurried off to church and begged a clergyman to turn a rich woman into a pauper; and you would have been saddled with a helpless doll stripped of her gewgaws and finery — if I had been simply reckless.

LAURENCE. We should have been happy, dearest; we should have been happy.

IRIS [*incredulously*]. Even then?

LAURENCE [*eagerly*]. Even then.

IRIS [*catching a little of his eagerness*]. What! happier, do you think, than we are merely as lovers?

LAURENCE. I believe so; in spite of your mistrust of yourself, I believe so.

IRIS [*relapsing into languor, her fingers straying over the strings of the guitar*]. Oh, of course I know it would have been better for our souls could I have grappled with the problem honestly and courageously — married you and gone out to — what is the name of the place — ?

LAURENCE. River Ranch — Chilcoten —

IRIS. That, or parted from you for ever. But, you see, I hadn't the recklessness on the one hand, nor the power of self-denial on the other. And so I treat your love as the poet did the fruit — I steal it; greedily and lazily I steal it. [*Laying her guitar aside with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah — h — h! However, we're contented as we are, aren't we? [*Closing her eyes.*] I am; I am.

[*They remain silent for a few moments, he staring at the floor with knitted brows. Suddenly she puts her hair back from her forehead and rises.*]

IRIS. Phew! it's very oppressive this morning.

[*She passes him, walking away towards the right and there standing idly.*

LAURENCE [*after a pause, heavily*]. Dearest —

IRIS. Laurie?

LAURENCE. Naturally you wonder why I am continually catechising you about yourself.

IRIS. You enjoy diving down into the depths of my character — is that it? Cruel when they are such shallow little depths. [*Pitifully.*] The process disturbs the surface of me — makes ripples, as it were.

LAURENCE [*rising and going to her*]. Yes, my persistency must seem terribly ill-bred. [*Hesitatingly.*] But it's all part of my anxiety concerning the future.

IRIS. The future?

LAURENCE. Our future.

IRIS. Why, what is on your mind?

LAURENCE [*gently*]. Iris, things can't continue as they are.

IRIS [*with a note of alarm in her voice*]. Eh? What has happened?

LAURENCE [*soothingly*]. Nothing — nothing. Only — I hate to be obliged to talk to you in this strain — I have to deal with the old question once more.

IRIS. The old question?

LAURENCE. A means of livelihood.

IRIS [*with wide-open eyes*]. A means of livelihood!

LAURENCE. You remember that when, six weeks ago, I wrote to my uncle, telling him I was hanging-up for a while the idea of leaving England, he sent me, generously enough, his good wishes and a cheque for five hundred pounds?

IRIS. Yes.

LAURENCE. At the same time his letter conveyed a very decided intimation that I was neither to see him nor hear from him again.

IRIS. I read Archdeacon Standish's note.

LAURENCE. It is evident I can look for nothing further in that direction.

IRIS. Quite. What does that matter?

LAURENCE [*avoiding her gaze*]. Therefore, those five hundred pounds — or, rather, what remains of them — represent all I have with which to —

IRIS. To — ?

LAURENCE. To commence operations.

IRIS. Operations?

LAURENCE. Work.

IRIS. Where?

LAURENCE. Out there.

IRIS [*almost inaudibly*]. Laurie!

LAURENCE. Through my delay I have lost the chance of taking over Eardley's ranch at Chilcoten, even if I possessed the capital. But the other scheme remains.

IRIS. The other?

LAURENCE. Joining Fred Bagot. He's five-and-twenty miles nearer the Soda Creek, you know, where there's a post-office and all sorts of civilization. I could pay him the premium he asks — two hundred and fifty — and peg away with a view to a partnership. The second plan might prove as good in the end as the original one.

IRIS [*breathlessly*]. Laurie!

LAURENCE. Dearest!

IRIS. Laurie, why are you teasing me?

LAURENCE. Teasing you?

IRIS. Reviving the notion of that terrible ranch!

LAURENCE. Iris, it is the one career I am fitted for. I should succeed at it; I feel I should succeed at it.

IRIS. But there is no longer any necessity for it! The project belongs to the past! [*He attempts to speak; she interrupts him.*] Oh, we have hitherto avoided the subject of money matters, Laurence — it is such a distasteful topic as between you and me. Dear, you shall never again have the smallest care about money; I want you to regard your embarrassments as absolutely at an end. It is unkind of you to have kept your anxieties from me in this way.

LAURENCE. Iris — Iris — you don't understand.

IRIS. What else — ?

LAURENCE. You don't understand that a man — some men, at least; I among the number — can't accept money from a woman.

IRIS [*blankly*]. Why not?

LAURENCE. Become dependent upon a woman! [*Walking away and sitting upon the settee by the nearer window.*] Live upon a woman!

IRIS [*following him and standing at the back of the settee*]. But — the circumstances — ! We love each other.

LAURENCE [*with clenched hands*]. Does that make the situation easier for me? Iris, the position would be intolerable.

IRIS. No, no.

LAURENCE. Intolerable. Intolerable.

[*She leaves him and wanders away to the breakfast-table, where she sits plucking at the leaves of some of the flowers which decorate the table. He rises, walks to the further window, looks out, and then joins her.*]

LAURENCE [*remorsefully*]. I know I'm cruel, dearest. But it's of a piece with the rest of my behavior; I've been cruel to you from the very beginning.

IRIS. Never till now.

LAURENCE. Yes, I ought to have been strong; I ought to have constituted myself your protector. I ought to have

said good-bye to you finally on the night of your dinner-party.

Iris. I forgive you all that. That was my fault. But now — !

Laurence. [*partly to himself*]. One could have done it if one had chosen. I simply allowed the current to carry both of us away.

Iris. Why should we try to escape from the current? We love each other; we've been happy; we *are* happy. Why aren't you satisfied to be one of my birds — oh, but my best, my most dearly prized? Just for a scruple — !

Laurence. Scruple!

Iris. [*suddenly*]. Laurence, directly we return to London I will see Archie Kane and insist upon his obtaining some suitable occupation for you in town. I will! He and I have already talked over the matter. He mentioned a secretaryship as being possible.

Laurence. I know — the sort of billet that provides a man with gloves and cab-fares, and a flower for his coat! [*Entreatingly.*] Iris — Iris, I don't ask you any longer to share the difficulties I must meet with at the outset — a novice starting life on a ranch. But afterwards, when the struggle is over, when affairs settle down into their steady course — !

Iris. Their steady course! [*Rising.*] That's it! Their steady course! [*Shudderingly.*] Oh, don't, don't!

[*She goes to the settee by the further window and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows. He follows her.*]

Laurence. [*standing behind the settee and bending over her*]. Iris! Dearest! Listen! If all went well with me, it wouldn't be hardship and a bare home I could welcome you to. Within a few years there would be comforts, pretty walls to gaze at, servants to wait upon you — !

Iris. [*looking up piteously*]. Two Chinamen — or three? An extra boy to maid me? Oh, Laurie!

Laurence. The Chinese are excellent servants. Bardley describes them in one of his letters —

[*Raising herself so that she kneels upon the settee, she puts her hands upon his shoulders.*]

Iris. Another time! Let us discuss the point thoroughly another time, Laurie! Another time!

Laurence. When?

Iris. When we leave here. We are happy. Look! how blue the sky and the lake are! Dear, life will never be quite like this again. After we have left this place!

Laurence. [*irresolutely*]. If I say Yes — ?

Iris. [*with a cry of delight*]. Ah!

Laurence. [*warmingly*]. Dearest, your term here expires in a fortnight.

Iris. I can continue it for another month.

Laurence. Another month — !

Iris. Hush! hush! you have promised. I have your promise; I have your promise —

[*There is the sound of voices in the distance.*]

Iris. [*releasing him and listening*]. Fanny and Croker! [*Pressing her hands to her eyes.*] My face — !

[*She goes out quickly, at the door. He walks about in thought, his head bowed, his hands deep in his pockets. Coming upon the guitar, he picks it up, sits, and twangs its strings discordantly. At length, the voices growing nearer, he lays the guitar aside and interests himself with the magazines.* Fanny *and* Croker *enter at the further window, talking.*]

Fanny. Yes, quite an unexpected encounter.

Croker. Where does he hail from — I didn't gather — ?

Fanny. From Aix. I recognised his back instantly.

Croker. You can claim no credit for that; it's the most prosperous-looking back in Europe.

Fanny. [*to* Laurence]. If this invasion continues, Mrs. Bellamy will be driven from Cadenabbia by her friends, Mr. Trenwith.

[Iris *returns, unnoticed outwardly composed and placid.*]

LAURENCE [*politely*]. Only by a desire to follow them when they depart. Who is the new arrival, may I ask?

FANNY. Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

IRIS. Ah! [*They all turn towards her.*] Of whom are you talking?

FANNY. Our great friend — in every sense of the word — Freddy Maldonado.

CROKER. We met him a few minutes ago in the hall of the Belle Vue.

IRIS [*calmly*]. Oh, yes.

FANNY. He has just come from Milan. He has been at Aix.

[*The* SERVANTS *enter, carrying a couple of light chairs. They proceed to arrange the two additional places at the table. The doors are left open.*]

IRIS [*advancing*]. Indeed? Is he — well?

FANNY. If he is, he's far better than he looks. I thought his appearance pretty shocking — didn't you, Croker?

CROKER. Let me see — did I?

FANNY. His color! What does his complexion resemble? I know — that delicious subcutaneous part of a wedding-cake! [*The men laugh.*] And his eyes! I suppose Aix has made him flabby — *I've* never seen such great, heavy — what d'ye call 'em? — pouches as he has under his eyes.

CROKER. The accumulation of wealth. With him, even nature opens a deposit account.

FANNY [*after another laugh*]. Well, what a moral! These are the sights that reconcile one to the possession of a moderate income.

IRIS [*in a low voice, looking away*]. Poor Maldo!

FANNY. Eh? Oh, of course, dear, I exaggerate, as usual. But you'll be able to judge for yourself; his first walk, naturally, will be taken in your direction.

IRIS [*constrainedly*]. I — I hope so. [*Perceiving that the* MAN-SERVANT *is waiting to address her.*] Yes?

MAN-SERVANT. Breakfast, ma'am.

IRIS [*at the table*]. Fanny, will you face me? [*To* CROKER, *indicating the chair on her right.*] Croker — [*to* LAURENCE] Mr. Trenwith —

[*They sit* — IRIS *with her back to the further window, the others in the positions assigned to them. The* WOMAN-SERVANT, *who has previously withdrawn, now returns with a tray of various* hors-d'œuvres. *The man takes the tray from her and presents it to those at the table, who help themselves and eat during the talk which follows. The* WOMAN *retires.*]

IRIS. This is delightful — delightful — delightful.

CROKER. Beyond measure, dear lady.

IRIS. Ah, but to have you and Fanny with me in these sweet surroundings!

[CROKER *raises her hand to his lips chivalrously.*]

IRIS [*smiling*]. Faithful One!

FANNY [*taking* IRIS'S *disengaged hand, across the table*]. Divinity!

IRIS. Dear Fanny! [*Looking at those around her, with a little sigh.*] Ah, how many real, close friends can one hope to carry through life, if one is lucky, in spite of one's imperfections and infirmities! Has it ever been estimated?

FANNY. Oh, yes — as many as you can count upon the fingers of your two hands, we are told.

LAURENCE. Upon one hand would be a closer computation, I fancy.

CROKER. You're right, Mr. Trenwith — barring the thumb.

IRIS. That, at least, allows me four. I have three here.

LAURENCE. You are very kind —

IRIS. Ah, but remember, you are only a cadet, Mr. Trenwith. Mr. Harrington and Miss Sylvain are fully graduated.

LAURENCE. I am honored by the humblest position assigned to me.

FANNY. There is still one finger unprovided for. Who is to be the fourth — the faithful fourth?

CROKER [*to* IRIS]. Yes, whom would you elect to accompany us three to the vale of gray hairs and rheumatism?

IRIS [*reflecting*]. Whom — ?

FANNY. Freddy Maldonado?

[IRIS *is silent, looking down upon her plate.*]

CROKER. Archie Kane?

FANNY. Dear old Archie!

[*The* WOMAN-SERVANT *enters with some letters and newspapers. She lays them on the table at* IRIS'S *side and, taking the tray from the* MAN, *goes out. The* MAN *employs himself at the sideboard in mixing a salad.*]

IRIS [*to the* WOMAN]. Thanks. [*To those at the table, apologetically.*] It is a habit of mine, when I am abroad, to clutch at my letters directly they arrive.

FANNY. Unwise! You may find a bill —a heavy one.

IRIS. Ha, ha!

CROKER. A splendid corrective — the skeleton at the feast!

IRIS. Let us drown the thought. Fanny drinks white wine, Croker. That water is Mattoni.

[CROKER *helps* FANNY *to wine from a decanter which has been transferred from the sideboard to the table.*]

IRIS [*passing a decanter of red wine to* LAURENCE]. Mr. Trenwith — ?

LAURENCE [*taking up the decanter*]. May I — ?

IRIS [*pushing her glass towards him*]. A little. [*Observing the newspapers.*] The papers. I wonder whether the gossip contains news of poor Mrs. Wynning. [*Selecting a newspaper and handing it to* CROKER.] Do look, Croker.

CROKER. Certainly.

[*He tears off the wrapper and opens the paper. The* WOMAN-SERVANT *returns, carrying a dish of mayonnaise of fish which she deposits upon the sideboard. The* MAN *removes from the table the plates which have been used and replaces them with others. The* WOMAN *again withdraws.*]

FANNY. Mrs. Wynning?

IRIS. Haven't you heard? She was thrown from her dog-cart last week.

FANNY. Oh!

IRIS. She had driven to the station at Champness to meet her husband. Her horse wasn't broken to trains, evidently, and bolted.

FANNY. She is badly hurt?

IRIS. Terribly bruised and shaken, I fear. [*To* CROKER.] Is there a paragraph?

CROKER [*turning the paper*]. Not in the middle of the paper. There may be a footnote —

[*His eye is arrested by some matter in the paper and he reads silently and absorbedly.*]

IRIS [*watching him*]. There *is* an announcement.

CROKER. Y-yes.

IRIS [*apprehensively*]. Not reassuring? [*After a pause.*] Croker!

CROKER. Extraordinary. Extraordinary.

FANNY. Extraordinary?

[*Leaning towards him, she discovers the item of news which interests him.*]

FANNY [*breathlessly*]. Croker!

[*The* MAN-SERVANT *hands the dish of mayonnaise to* IRIS.]

FANNY [*in a strange voice*]. Iris, dear, let us be alone for a few moments.

IRIS [*to the* SERVANT]. I'll ring.

[*This* MAN *places the dish before* IRIS *and leaves the room, partially shutting the doors. Directly he has disappeared,* FANNY *goes to the doors and completely closes them.* IRIS *and* LAURENCE *rise from the table.*]

IRIS. Croker!

CROKER [*calmly*]. Yes, most extraordinary.

IRIS [*looking over his shoulder*]. What — ?

CROKER [*rising and moving away*]. But there is nothing in it, I am convinced. It must be an error — a gross libel —

IRIS. Libel — upon whom?

FANNY [*coming to her*]. Archie — Archie Kane!

IRIS. Archie — ?

FANNY. Read it aloud, Croker.

CROKER. No, no, I can't credit anything of the kind. Don't be alarmed, I pray.

[FANNY *goes to him and takes the paper out of his hand.*]

FANNY [*reading*]. "The disquieting rumors which have recently been current concerning the sudden disappear-

ance of a well-known London solicitor are unhappily substantiated by a statement formally issued yesterday by Mr. James Woodroffe, of the firm of Woodroffe & Kane of 71 Lincoln's Inn Fields. From this document it transpires that the missing gentleman is Mr. Woodroffe's partner — Mr. Archibald Sidmouth Kane — and its frank avowals afford too much reason to fear that the books of the firm will be found to furnish yet another lamentable instance of the injudicious confidence of clients." [*There is a pause; then, in a mechanical way,* FANNY *resumes.*] "Some sympathy is, however, claimed for Mr. Woodroffe, whose indifferent health for the past two years has unfitted him for business, and who has, in consequence, been induced to leave affairs in the complete control of his partner. Mr. Archibald Kane resided in Upper Brook Street and was exceedingly popular in London society." [*Looking from one to the other.*] Eh — well?

CROKER. I repeat, I can't credit it.

FANNY. That he has disappeared?

CROKER. That he's a rogue.

FANNY [*faintly*]. Mr. Woodroffe's statement! And no newspaper would risk —

CROKER. You have some other papers there.

[*Two newspapers remain upon the table.* LAURENCE *hands them to* IRIS, *who passes them to* FANNY. FANNY *gives one to* CROKER *and retains the other, and they proceed to remove the wrappers. As they do so, they exchange glances, and then, together, look at* IRIS, *who is now sitting, on the left of the table, with her face averted.*]

FANNY. Iris!

IRIS. Yes, dear?

FANNY. Was another trustee to your husband's will ever appointed in Tom Cautherley's place?

IRIS. No. It has been talked about. Some names are under consideration. Archie is the only trustee at present.

[*Again* FANNY'S *eyes meet* CROKER'S, *and there is a further pause.* LAURENCE *goes out on to the balcony.*]

FANNY [*to* CROKER]. You—you were in his hands?

CROKER [*with a nod and a smile*]. H'm. And you?

[*She raises her arms slightly and lets them fall.* IRIS *rises.*]

IRIS [*in level tones*]. I entirely agree with Croker — we are upsetting ourselves quite needlessly. Dear Fanny, you know Archie — we all know Archie — too well to — [*Walking about the room.*] There will be an explanation. This Mr. Woodroffe! A case, perhaps, of a quarrel between partners. As for my own concerns, of course a fresh trustee ought to have been appointed at once when Mr. Cautherley died. [*Pressing her fingers to her temples.*] Why hasn't it been seen to? Other interests are involved. *I* must see to it when I go back.

[*While* IRIS *is talking and pacing the room,* FANNY *and* CROKER *open and anxiously search the other newspapers; she sitting on the left of the breakfast-table, he by the lower window.*]

CROKER. Substantially, the same report is in this paper.

FANNY. I can find nothing. Your letters, Iris! Have you received any letter — ?

IRIS [*examining her letters*]. No. [*With a smile.*] As you were saying — tradesmen's accounts. [*Surveying the breakfast-table and then looking at the others.*] Our unfortunate little *déjeuner!*

FANNY [*energetically*]. We mustn't sit here. [*Jumping up.*] We must send a telegram — a wire to London!

CROKER [*throwing his newspaper aside and rising with alacrity*]. Yes.

FANNY. Let us get the report confirmed, at any rate.

CROKER. Contradicted, we hope.

FANNY. To whom can we — ?

CROKER. Leave that to me. [*To* IRIS.] May I be excused?

[*She again smiles, in assent, and he seizes his hat and umbrella and comes to her.* FANNY *sits, on the left, resuming her search in the newspaper.*]

CROKER. Divinity, some day we shall

enjoy a hearty laugh at the recollection of this scare. A scare — nothing else, take my word for it. Ah, yes, your charming breakfast! You will invite me on another occasion? [*Bending over her hand, a suspicion of a tremor in his voice.*] Many — many thanks.

[*He goes out at the door. She walks, aimlessly, to the middle of the room.*]

FANNY [*turning*]. Croker, if you meet little Auren, don't breathe a word— [*following him*] Croker! Let the child have her afternoon's pleasure undisturbed — !

[*She disappears. The doors are left open.* LAURENCE, *seeing that* IRIS *is alone, comes to her side. They speak in hushed voices.*]

LAURENCE. Iris!

IRIS [*impassively*]. Yes?

LAURENCE. This man, Kane? Can it be that he's a scoundrel? Is it possible?

IRIS. No — *im*possible, *im*possible.

LAURENCE. And yet — suppose — suppose — ?

IRIS. What?

LAURENCE. Suppose he *has* been tampering — speculating — ?

IRIS [*tremblingly*]. With my fortune?

LAURENCE [*eloquently*]. Ah, my dearest! my dearest!

IRIS [*looking at him steadily, with a queer little twist of her mouth*]. Yes — after all — after everything — wouldn't it be — droll?

[FANNY'S *voice is heard, calling.*]

FANNY [*in the hall*]. Iris!

IRIS. Eh?

FANNY. Iris — a friend!

[LAURENCE *retreats from her side, as* MALDONADO *enters.*]

MALDONADO [*advancing*]. Pardon. I am very unceremonious. Miss Sylvain —

[*He breaks off. There is a moment of constraint on her part, then she extends her hand to him.*]

IRIS [*almost inaudibly*]. Maldo — !

[*The curtain falls.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is that of the preceding act. It is night-time. Without, the lake sparkles under a full moon, while the lights of Bellagio cluster brightly at the water's edge. Within the room there is an air of preparation for the departure of its tenant. The draggets are removed, and the statuary, curtains, candelabra, and much of the furniture, are in holland wrappers. One of the settees is pushed against the wall on the left — some footstools are piled upon it; and between the middle window and the further window are two chairs, the one on top of the other. Two bottles of champagne and some glasses are upon the table on which breakfast was served in the previous act. On the left of this table is the other settee, on its right a chair. The writing-table now stands out in the left-center of the room, facing the lower and middle windows. A chair is before it, and near at hand is a wooden packing-case. The lid of the packing-case is open, and the guitar and a quantity of books and music are seen to have been carelessly thrown in.

The birds have disappeared from the balcony; a single bird-cage, covered with baize, stands upon one of the cabinets. The room is lighted by oil lamps.

[FANNY SYLVAIN, *with a set face, deep in thought, is seated upon the settee in the center of the room. She is in semi-toilette and has a lace scarf upon her shoulders. There is the faint sound of distant music. The double-doors open and* CROKER HARRINGTON, *in traveling dress, is shown in by the* MAN-SERVANT.]

CROKER [*to the* MAN]. Please let Mrs. Bellamy know that I have just arrived.

MAN-SERVANT. Mr. 'Arrington — yes, sir.

[*The* SERVANT *withdraws, closing the doors.* FANNY *rises and shakes hands with* CROKER *heartily.*]

FANNY. Ah!

CROKER. My dear Fanny!

FANNY. Dear Croker! Have you had a pleasant journey?

CROKER [*with a wry face*]. Pleasant!

FANNY. How's London?

CROKER [*placing his hat upon the writing-table and taking off his gloves*]. Crowded.

FANNY. What, in the first week in October?

CROKER. Oh, under normal conditions I daresay I should have regarded it as a deserted village. But when a man is down, and desires to hide his head —

FANNY. The pavement sprouts acquaintances.

CROKER. Precisely.

FANNY [*laying a hand upon his arm*]. No good news, then?

CROKER [*shaking his head*]. I might have spared myself the trouble —

FANNY. You undertook it for our sakes as well as for your own. I meant — no good news for yourself? We know *our* fate.

CROKER. You do?

FANNY. We have been in communication with the people who are engaged in examining the affairs of the wretched Woodroffe. [*With a gesture of despair.*] Oh, it's awful!

CROKER [*putting his gloves in his hat as an excuse for turning away.*] I am glad it doesn't fall to my lot to break the worst to you.

FANNY. I've been robbed of every shilling, Croker.

CROKER. And I.

FANNY. All gone — every penny.

CROKER. Every cent — red or otherwise.

FANNY. Where's that beast?

CROKER. Archie?

FANNY. Puh!

CROKER. He's known to have reached America.

FANNY. What has America done?

CROKER. Poor devil!

FANNY. Devil.

CROKER. It was the collapse of this so-called Universal Finance Corporation that overwhelmed him, it appears. He was deep in it.

FANNY. And we thought him a solid, cautious creature — !

CROKER. We were gulls. At the end he made a desperate effort to save the concern, I hear — and with *her* money.

FANNY [*clenching her hands*]. Oh! Where was he last seen?

CROKER. At a theater, complaining of the quality of the music played during an *entr'acte*.

FANNY. If he'd only had the common decency to shoot himself! Good heavens, and I'm thirty, Croker!

CROKER. I'm nearly forty.

FANNY. And I'm losing my looks!

CROKER. And I'm not.

FANNY. Ha, ha, ha! You — you — you foolish — [*Hiding her face upon his shoulder for a moment, then lifting her head cheerily and brushing her tears away.*] Excuse me for compromising you. You'll take your coat off? She will be down in a few minutes.

CROKER [*depositing his coat and hat upon the settee on the left*]. Have you formed any plans yet?

FANNY. Aurea and I go up to Scotland for a month or so, to relations — to enable us to "look round," as they express it. Perhaps you can explain the process of "looking round" in the midst of a circle of solemn relatives.

CROKER [*returning to her*]. Oh, you talk in a low key, and play Halma in the evening, and get to bed early.

FANNY. Ha! And you?

CROKER. One of the men I butted-into in town thinks I would make an ideal secretary for a new club about to be started in Piccadilly.

FANNY. What is an ideal club-secretary?

CROKER. A fellow who sees that the members have every opportunity for grumbling, and no cause. [*The music ceases; he goes to the further window, which is open, and looks out.*] Thank goodness, that wretched band is silent!

FANNY. Your musical taste is as fastidious as Mr. Kane's. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Fancy! for the remainder of one's life, if one lives to be a hundred, moonlight, a still,

luscious evening, the sound of music — always to remind one of ruin!

CROKER [*coming to her and leaning over her chair, softly*]. Fanny.

FANNY. Yes?

CROKER. How does she bear it?

FANNY. Splendidly.

CROKER. Ah!

FANNY. I've loved her, as you know, for years, intensely; but I am *proud* of her now. Her whole nature seems to have expanded, Croker — become greater, nobler.

CROKER [*tenderly*]. The capacity was there; it only needed this.

FANNY. Luckily she doesn't come off quite as deplorably as you and I — our poor Divinity. Her new man of business believes he'll manage to salvage about a hundred-and-fifty a year for her out of the wreck.

CROKER [*wincing*]. Tsch! I hoped —

FANNY. It *would* have been more, but it turns out that she's heavily in debt, dear thing.

CROKER. He never curbed her.

FANNY. Kane? Not he! Tempted her, I suspect — [*starting up furiously*] professed to be discharging her bills while he was embezzling the money, I shouldn't wonder.

CROKER [*soothingly*]. No, no; give the devil his due.

FANNY [*her fingers twitching*]. If I could! if I could! [*Calming herself as she walks about the room.*] And so the lease of her house in London, her pictures and furniture, jewels, plate — they have all to be thrown into the pot; and she's left with the few louis she has in her *porte-monnaie* and the prospect of this miserable hundred-and-fifty a year.

CROKER. But her friends — !

FANNY. She won't accept a sou from a living soul, she declares. [*Setting herself upon the settee in the center.*] That's where she's so fine. She *will* live upon three paltry pounds a week. She!

CROKER [*standing beside her, with a confident smile*]. Ah, for the present. But, my dear Fanny, one isn't resigning oneself to the secretaryship of a Piccadilly club for the rest of existence. [*Going to the back of the settee and bending over it — speaking almost into her ear.*] I, too, intend to "look round." And by-and-by — you and she — my playmates — companions with me in this mud-puddle game of life, in which we have all got seriously splashed —

FANNY [*abruptly*]. Ah, stop — of course, you've been away — you haven't heard — !

CROKER. What?

FANNY. She has definitely engaged herself to young Trenwith.

CROKER [*standing upright*]. Ah!

FANNY. At a moment when a man with even a moderate position in the world — ! But, there, she's given her heart to him, and she's full of pluck. God bless her!

[*The distant music is heard again.*]

CROKER [*somewhat huskily*]. God bless them both! He — he's a nice chap. And a fortunate one. [*Sitting in the chair which is behind her, his elbow on the table, his hand shading his face.*] Capital! capital!

[*Struck by his tone, she glances at him and observes his attitude. After a slight pause, she rises and moves away to the open window, where she stands looking into the distance.*]

FANNY [*gently*]. As you say, Mr. Trenwith is favored of fortune. But it isn't to be quite yet a while.

CROKER. No?

FANNY. Not for two or three years, I gather. He goes out to a ranch in British Columbia and comes back to fetch her when he has succeeded in making a home for her. He starts for London directly — at something before six to-morrow morning. [*Pointing to the champagne and glasses upon the table.*] Look! you have returned in time to drink the boy's health.

CROKER [*rising, cheerfully*]. Excellent! I'll drain my last bumper of champagne to him, preparatory to taking to club-porter. [*Seriously.*] And she, during his absence — ? [*Observing the condition of the room.*] She vacates the Villa Prigno at once, evidently?

FANNY. She goes into a humble little *Pension* at Tremezzo, for a while.

CROKER [*partially suppressing a groan*]. Oh!

FANNY [*coming to him*]. Yes, she also dates her new life, practically, from to-morrow. I've been upstairs with her, helping her to pack the few plain gowns she is retaining out of her stock.

CROKER. Why, has her maid — ?

FANNY. Beaumont, her maid, went a week ago. [CROKER *sinks upon the settee, burying his head in his hands.*] Oh, my dear man, don't groan. Our Divinity! to see her on her knees among her trunks, with such a sweet, earnest, helpless, confident look — it's one of the prettiest sights imaginable!

[MALDONADO'S *voice is heard lightly humming an accompaniment to the air played by the band.*]

FANNY [*listening*]. There's Frederick.

CROKER [*looking up*]. Frederick?

FANNY. Maldonado.

CROKER. Oh, is he still here?

FANNY. Yes. He has been so brotherly and sympathetic to us women.

[*She goes to the window and meets* MALDONADO. MALDONADO *is in evening dress and is smoking. Notwithstanding the changes in his appearance suggested by* FANNY *in the previous act, he appears to be in excellent spirits.*]

FANNY. Good evening, Frederick.

MALDONADO [*on the balcony*]. What a perfect night, eh? I've bestowed a few extra francs upon those fellows playing outside the Belle Vue. We will celebrate our young friend's leave-taking with musical honors.

FANNY. Here's Croker.

MALDONADO [*entering the room*]. The traveler returned! [*Coming to* CROKER.] My dear boy!

CROKER [*shaking hands with him without rising*]. Hullo, Freddy!

MALDONADO. I am still kicking my heels about the verge of this monotonous pond. [*Observing that* FANNY *has gone out upon the balcony — lowering his voice.*] One's heart bleeds for these ladies. And yet they both — with the characteristic obstinacy of their sex — decline to avail themselves of my poor services. How goes it? Your visit to London has not proved too satisfactory?

CROKER. Quite the reverse. Oh, except that I'm likely to take the secretaryship of the new club Bulkeley is promoting.

MALDONADO. No!

CROKER. Hope you'll come in.

MALDONADO [*with a protesting shrug*]. My dear, good Croker, we are pals of some years' standing, you and I — need I say more? Dooce take Bulkeley and his club!

CROKER [*rising*]. Freddy!

MALDONADO [*grandly*]. Pish! not a word. Pray write me a line.

CROKER [*with feeling*]. Thanks, old man. I haven't reached that stage yet — never shall, I trust. [*Gripping* MALDONADO'S *hand.*] But — thanks, old man.

[FANNY *returns to the room. The music ceases.*]

MALDONADO [*gently shaking* CROKER *by the shoulder*]. Confound you, you are as perverse as our fair friends — what! [*Breaking off upon perceiving* FANNY *and walking away.*] I observe the banquet is prepared, my dear Fanny. [*Throwing his hat upon the writing-table.*] Where are the principal figures?

FANNY. I think I've just seen Mr. Trenwith in the garden.

MALDONADO [*slightly unpleasantly*]. Ho! Is he meditating a parting serenade under Iris's window? [*Imitating the playing of a guitar.*] R-r-rhm! r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm — tum, tum! He touches the guitar most gracefully.

FANNY [*sitting at the table on the right*]. The mandolines. Don't be unfeeling, Frederick.

MALDONADO. Unfeeling! I! When I am here to join in the general tearful farewell! [*To* CROKER.] You've heard the great news?

CROKER [*again seated upon the settee*]. Just heard it.

MALDONADO [*carelessly examining a photograph of* LAURENCE *which he takes from the writing-table*]. And haven't I pledged myself to rise at an unconscionably early hour to-morrow morning, in order that I may escort this lucky young gentleman to the steamboat and report

upon the final incidents of his departure? You'll assist, Croker?

CROKER. With pleasure.

MALDONADO. No, upon second thoughts, I decline to share the privilege. I hold the commission direct from Iris, and I claim the right of executing it unaccompanied.

[LAURENCE, *wearing a suit of blue serge, appears upon the balcony.*]

MALDONADO [*laying the photograph aside*]. Yes, here is the hero of the occasion. We are talking about you, my dear Laurence.

LAURENCE [*entering the room*]. Are you? [*To* CROKER, *who advances to meet him.*] Mr. Harrington! [*They shake hands.*] I'm glad you're back in time to give me a parting shake of the hand.

CROKER. Trenwith, I congratulate you, from the bottom of my heart.

LAURENCE [*with feeling*]. Isn't it — isn't it jolly?

[IRIS *enters quietly, closing the door after her. She is plainly dressed, without ornament of any kind. Her face is somewhat wan, her eyes red, her manner very gentle and subdued; but her whole appearance and bearing express a spirit of happiness and resolve.* FANNY *rises, and the men, hearing* IRIS *enter, turn silently towards her. She advances to* CROKER.]

IRIS [*giving him her hand*]. Dear Croker —

CROKER. The bad penny!

IRIS. With no satisfactory news of your affairs?

CROKER. I'm all right — a bachelor whose hat covers his kingdom. What about yourself?

[LAURENCE *is on her other side; she lays a hand upon his arm.*]

IRIS [*to* CROKER]. They have told you — ?

CROKER [*with a nod*]. I've returned in the nick of time, eh?

IRIS. I should always have grieved if you had not been with us to-night. You congratulate us?

CROKER [*smiling at* LAURENCE]. I've already patted *him* on the back.

LAURENCE. That he has!

IRIS. Give *me* your good wishes.

CROKER [*a break in his voice*]. Oh, my dear — !

[*Stooping a little, she invites him to kiss her brow.*]

CROKER [*his lips touching her forehead*]. I congratulate you.

IRIS [*going to* MALDONADO]. Good evening, Maldo. We have dragged you away from the dinner-table. [*Surveying the table on the right, happily.*] Look at our modest preparations — the last of my excesses! After to-night — [*Going to the settee in the center and speaking, across the table, to* FANNY.] Fanny, ask Henry to give us our wine. Croker —

[FANNY *goes out at the door.* IRIS *sits upon the settee and* CROKER *comes to her side.* MALDONADO *and* LAURENCE—MALDONADO'S *arm round* LAURENCE'S *shoulder — move away to the open window. The music is resumed.*]

IRIS [*to* CROKER]. You have heard everything from Fanny, Faithful One?

CROKER [*nodding*]. You are moving on to Tremezzo, I understand?

IRIS. To-morrow morning, early [*closing her eyes*], directly I hear that I am alone — that *he* has gone. [*Recovering herself.*] I shall remain there for a few weeks — the *Pension* is moderately clean and pleasant — and then transfer myself to another cheap place, Varese perhaps. [*With enthusiasm.*] As long as I avoid heavy traveling-expenses, I shall manage admirably, admirably.

CROKER [*compassionately*]. You are like a child with a new toy, Divinity.

IRIS [*reproachfully*]. Croker! Poverty — a new toy!

CROKER. A new experience, at any rate. [*Earnestly.*] Are you sure you are justified in imposing this ordeal upon yourself?

IRIS. Ordeal?

CROKER. This life of mean economy.

IRIS. It is imposed upon me by circumstances.

CROKER. They can be lightened by

friends. It is maddening to reflect that I am useless to you at such a crisis; but there are dozens of other people who are attached to you — Freddy Maldonado —

IRIS. No, no. [*In an altered tone.*] Croker — [*He seats himself beside her, on her left.*] Dear, dear friend, I — I want to tell you — [*dropping her voice*] I welcome this change in my fortunes; I welcome it.

CROKER. Welcome it!

IRIS. I have deserved it, Croker. I regard it as my proper penalty, my scourge.

CROKER. Scourge! for what, in heaven's name?

IRIS [*evasively*]. Oh, do you imagine a woman can be as self-centered as I have been, pamper herself as I have done, without meriting chastisement?

CROKER. You are a good woman, to receive your reverses in this spirit.

IRIS [*drawing a deep breath*]. Am I? There can be nothing very meritorious in accepting resignedly that which gives me self-respect, makes me worthier of Laurence, equips me for the future I am one day to share with him [*shaking her head*]. It is only another — a better — form of selfishness. Oh, but I feel so much happier; so much happier!

CROKER [*patting her hand*]. And to-morrow — ?

IRIS. To-morrow I actually enter into my new being. To-morrow!

[FANNY *returns, followed by the* MANSERVANT, *who proceeds to open one of the bottles of champagne and to fill the glasses.* IRIS *rises and, going to the open window, speaks to* LAURENCE *and* MALDONADO, *who are now upon the balcony.* FANNY *joins* CROKER.]

IRIS [*to* FANNY, *as she passes her*]. Thanks, dear Fanny.

FANNY [*to* CROKER, *eagerly*]. Has she been talking to you?

CROKER. Yes.

FANNY. Well! Am I not right — isn't she noble?

CROKER [*nodding*]. All conditions of life are relative. For her, this is martyrdom. [*A cork is drawn; he glances, over his shoulder, at the table.*] I feel as if I were about to help fire the faggots.

[*He stands with* FANNY *at the table, she on one side, he on the other.* IRIS *brings* LAURENCE *into the room;* MALDONADO *follows them and goes to the table.*]

MALDONADO. May I have the honor of presiding at these proceedings?

IRIS [*sitting by the writing-table*]. How simple you are, Maldo.

MALDONADO. Ha! there is a jealous light in our Croker's eye. But I would have him know that the idea of this ceremony originates with me — a stirrup-cup to Mr. Trenwith — !

CROKER [*presenting a glass of champagne to* IRIS]. A stirrup-cup to a traveler by boat and rail! Your metaphor is faulty, Freddy.

MALDONADO [*gaily*]. Hark! he revenges himself upon my metaphors!

[CROKER *walks away towards the open window, laughing.* FANNY *brings a glass of champagne to* LAURENCE, *who is standing at* IRIS'S *side, and returns to the settee. The* SERVANT *withdraws. The music stops.*]

MALDONADO [*handing a glass of wine to* FANNY]. My dear Fanny —

FANNY [*seating herself upon the settee*]. Thanks, Frederick.

MALDONADO [*giving a glass to* CROKER]. Croker! [*Raising his own glass.*] Our friend, Mr. Trenwith — my dear young companion of the past three weeks — whose departure to-morrow morning is, let us hope, an unerring step towards the brilliant future we desire for him! [*To* LAURENCE, *toasting him.*] Laurence, my dear boy! [*Generally.*] Mr. Trenwith!

[*All, save* LAURENCE, *put their glasses to their lips.*]

MALDONADO. Yes, a few weeks hence our friend Trenwith embarks upon a career in a distant country, far away — a great deal too far away — from those who, in spite of short acquaintance, have learned to hold him in their esteem, in

their affection. [*With a gesture.*] Laurie—

[LAURENCE *advances to* MALDONADO, *who again places an arm round his shoulder.*]

MALDONADO. You have a stiff time before you, dear boy. But the thought of the reward awaiting you will put grit into the toiler, carry him lightly over his hundreds of acres, and give ease to his weary limbs at the end of the day. And then, the triumph—hey?—the hour when the victor returns to us; when he claims the prize; when he is in a position to beseech delicate beauty to grace his modest establishment at—what do you call the place?—

FANNY. Soda Creek.

MALDONADO. Ha!—and to beg her to transform it, by her presence, into a palace! I drink to that hour and to the lady who inspires the fascinating picture—[*raising his glass again*] the lady who embodies, in her single person, loveliness, virtue, unspeakable charm; whose very name, for those assembled here, is perfume and music combined! Iris!

[*All, except* IRIS, *drink the toast; after which ceremony* FANNY *puts her glass aside and goes to* IRIS *and embraces her.*]

LAURENCE [*informally*]. Thank you, Mr. Maldonado. If one has to leave one's friends behind one, there is a grim consolation in knowing that they're such true friends—the best a man ever had.

CROKER [*dryly*]. Freddy, I've never heard you in better form, even at a City banquet.

MALDONADO [*good-humouredly*]. Ha, ha!

IRIS [*going to* MALDONADO *with outstretched hands*]. Thanks, thanks, dear Maldo.

[LAURENCE, IRIS, *and* MALDONADO *form a group on the right, talking together.* CROKER *joins* FANNY *on the left.*]

CROKER [*to* FANNY]. Fanny—

FANNY. Eh?

CROKER. Pish! Why need Freddy treat us to that piece of bombast? Of course it isn't so—but he spoke as if he didn't feel a syllable of it.

FANNY. I agree with you—a few simple words and a handshake—

MALDONADO [*paternally, to* IRIS *and* LAURENCE]. Well!, having discharged my duty, and mixed my metaphors, I leave you two young people to yourselves and to the company of the moon.

[CROKER *moves to take up his hat and coat.*]

IRIS [*smiling*]. No, I am going to hand Laurence over to your keeping at once, Maldo.

[CROKER *and* FANNY *look round in surprise.*]

MALDONADO [*also raising his brows*]. At once?

IRIS [*composedly, but with eyes averted*]. You have promised to see him on board the boat in the morning?

MALDONADO. Oh, yes.

IRIS. Half-past-five—!

MALDONADO. Five forty-two, to be precise.

IRIS. It is very good-natured of you to deprive yourself of your rest.

MALDONADO [*gallantly*]. Ah, for you—!

IRIS [*smiling again*]. No, for *him*.

MALDONADO. But I am to come to you afterwards, to bring you his final message?

IRIS [*with an inclination of the head*]. I shall remain here till you have called.

MALDONADO [*bending over her hand*]. Good-night. These are the sad moments of life—but you are brave. That's admirable of you. Good-night.

IRIS. Good-night, Maldo.

MALDONADO [*taking his hat from the writing-table and shaking hands with* FANNY]. I wish you good-night, dear Fanny.

FANNY. Good-night, Freddy.

MALDONADO [*shaking hands with* CROKER, *who is again at the further window*]. Good-night, my dear Croker.

CROKER. Good-night.

MALDONADO [*turning*]. You will find me in the garden, Laurie, sounding your praises to the lizards.

[LAURENCE *waves a hand to him in response and he departs by way of*

the balcony. LAURENCE *advances to* FANNY.]

LAURENCE [*simply*]. I want to thank you for your kindness to me, Miss Sylvain.

FANNY [*somewhat remorsefully*]. Ah!

LAURENCE. Fate is taking you in another direction for a time; but I shall always think of you — it will be a consolation to me to do so — as being at Iris's side.

FANNY. I shall contrive to be near her again soon, never fear. [*He holds out his hand; she grasps it.*] Luck!

LAURENCE [*firmly*]. I shall have it.

FANNY [*in a whisper*]. Don't be long.

LAURENCE [*lifting his head high*]. No; I shan't be long.

[*He leaves* FANNY *and encounters* CROKER, *who comes to him.*]

CROKER [*shortly*]. Well, Trenwith — !

LAURENCE. Well, Mr. Harrington!

CROKER. When does England see you again?

LAURENCE. In two years — three, at the furthest.

CROKER. I believe you. If I'm alive —

[*They grip hands and part.* IRIS *is now on the balcony;* LAURENCE *joins her there.* FANNY *and* CROKER, *the one on the left of the room, the other on the right, stand deliberately looking away from the lovers.* LAURENCE *takes* IRIS *in his arms and kisses her; then he calls to* MALDONADO.]

LAURENCE. Mr. Maldonado!

MALDONADO [*in the distance*]. Ohi!

[LAURENCE *disappears and* IRIS *remains on the balcony, leaning upon the balustrade, watching his retreating figure.* FANNY, *discovering by a glance that* IRIS *is alone, goes quickly to* CROKER, *who is struggling with his overcoat.*]

FANNY [*breathlessly*]. Croker —

CROKER. Eh?

FANNY. Is *this* their farewell?

CROKER [*puzzled*]. I — I presume so.

FANNY [*in complete astonishment*]. Good gracious!

CROKER. Oh, but we forget — they have said good-bye already, poor children.

FANNY [*nodding*]. Yes, that must be it. Still — [*rousing herself*]. Shall I assist you — ?

[*She helps him into his coat. The band strikes up a fresh air, and the curtain drops. It rises after a moment's pause and the windows and the jalousies are closed and the room is in almost total darkness. Through the darkness* IRIS *is seen reclining upon the settee in the center, sleeping.* LAURENCE *sits in a chair at the head of the settee, watching her. Both are dressed as in the earlier part of the act. The bells of a neighboring church tinkle a little chime and then strike the quarter-hour; at short intervals this is repeated by other bells in the distance; whereupon* LAURENCE *rises softly and tip-toes over to the writing-table. There, taking a match-box from his pocket, he strikes a match and lights a wax taper which stands upon the table. The light awakens the sleeper, who opens her eyes and, raising herself upon her elbow, stares at him. He produces his watch, winds it, and sets its time by that of a traveling-clock upon the table.*

IRIS. Laurence!

LAURENCE. Hush! don't be alarmed.

IRIS [*confused*]. What — ?

LAURENCE. The lamp has burnt itself out. The church-bells chimed; and I struck a match, to look at my watch.

IRIS [*pressing her hands upon her eyes*]. I had fallen asleep.

LAURENCE. Yes; I have been sitting here, watching you.

[*She rises, with his help, a little unsteadily, and walks across to the writing-table, where she consults the traveling-clock.*]

IRIS. A quarter past four. [*Turning to him.*] Oh! Why, you will soon — soon be — [*clinging to him*] almost directly — ! Oh, how cruel of you to allow me to sleep — to waste the time! How cruel of you! [*Observing a faint light through the chinks of the jalousies.*] There's the dawn.

LAURENCE [*sorrowfully*]. Yes.

IRIS. The dawn — !

[*She turns from him, and seating herself in the chair before the writing-table, lays her head upon the table and weeps.*]

LAURENCE [*bending over her*]. You were so white and weary, I saw your eyelids drooping, drooping; I hadn't the heart to rouse you. Dearest! dearest! dearest!

[*She composes herself gradually and rises, drying her eyes.*]

IRIS [*humbly*]. Forgive me; I am very childish. Nothing can alter it — the day has to begin. [*Indicating the further window.*] Open the jalousies.

[*He opens the window and, stepping out upon the balcony, pushes back the jalousies. The dawn is seen, leaden-colored and forbidding. She blows out the light of the taper and joins him at the window as he re-enters. He closes the window and they stand together for a while, his arm round her waist, gazing at the prospect.*]

IRIS [*shivering*]. Oh! oh! oh!

[*She leaves him and walks away to the settee in the center, where she sits with a scared look upon her face. He follows her.*]

IRIS. Laurie —

LAURENCE. Yes?

IRIS [*piteously*]. It was a mistake, dear.

LAURENCE. A mistake?

IRIS. This sitting together through the night and talking away our last hours. It would have been wiser if I had done what I at first had a mind to do — parted from you yesterday when the sun was shining brilliantly.

LAURENCE [*with an attempt at cheeriness*]. The sun will show himself again in a few minutes.

IRIS. As it does when one is driving home from a late ball — defining everything sharply, making everything appear terribly distinct [*holding out her hands to him*], terribly true. [*He sits beside her and, slipping her arm through his, she rests her head upon his shoulder.*] For how long was I sleeping?

LAURENCE. An hour, perhaps.

IRIS. And one's blood is always sluggish at dawn. It's at early morning that people sink and die. [*Tremblingly.*] Laurie!

LAURENCE [*kissing her brow*]. Dearest!

IRIS. I am afraid I have lost some of my courage; I'm frightened, I'm afraid.

LAURENCE. Frightened — ?

IRIS. At your going away — at your leaving me.

LAURENCE. Why, you were full of courage a little while ago.

IRIS. Yes, and then I dropped off to sleep [*nestling closer to him*] and became chilled.

LAURENCE [*deliberately*]. Iris —

IRIS. What?

LAURENCE. Listen, Iris — now listen.

IRIS [*fondly*]. I am listening; of course I am listening — listening.

LAURENCE. Dearest, why should we not change our plans, even at the eleventh hour — abandon the idea of separating, separating until I am ready to receive you? Prepared to receive you! what a stupid, formal sound the phrase has! Iris, my love, my life, follow me to London to-morrow. I will book your passage in the ship, by telegram, immediately I get to town; we will be married as quickly as possible after our arrival at Montreal — there or at Victoria; we will go out together. What do you say?

IRIS [*yearningly*]. Ah! ah! ah!

LAURENCE. Yes, go out together; share the struggle from the very beginning; endure together; build up prosperity atom by atom, together.

IRIS [*shaking her head*]. Ah, if it could be, dear; if it could be!

LAURENCE. Why can't it be?

IRIS. Oh, what a contempt Fanny would have for me — !

LAURENCE [*disdainfully*]. Fanny — !

IRIS. After all my protestations. And Croker and Maldo! [*Releasing him and sitting away from him.*] Yes, and how I should despise myself — !

LAURENCE. Without the smallest reason.

IRIS. Loathe myself! And how you

would despise me, by-and-by, upon reflection — !

LAURENCE. I!

IRIS. Recollecting that I had declined to make a sacrifice for you when I was well-off; that it was not till I was poor — almost as poor as yourself — that I would marry you; and that then I promptly hung myself round your neck like a stone — became a dead weight upon you at a time when you most needed freedom from care and responsibility.

LAURENCE. Whenever you come to me — two, three years hence — you will come as a poor woman; you will come as a precious burden to me.

IRIS. But after I have had my own struggle, my own battle with poverty, singly, alone; after I have proved to you that I can live, patiently, uncomplainingly, without luxury, willingly relinquishing costly pleasures, content with the barest comfort. [*Rising.*] Yes, yes — after I have shown you that there are other, and better, and deeper qualities in my nature than you have suspected; than I, myself, have suspected. [*He rises and takes her in his arms.*] Then, then I'll join you, Laurie. And in the meantime you mustn't seek to make me falter in my resolutions. Help me to keep them, dear. I could cut my tongue out for having spoken as I did just now; I felt cold; I hadn't lost courage, really. [*Putting him from her and standing erect.*] Look at me! Fanny declares she's proud of me. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Well — and you — ?

LAURENCE [*kneeling before her and taking her hands in his.*] Proud! proud! No man, honored by the favors of a queen, ever felt deeper pride than I feel in the possession of your love.

IRIS [*bending over him so that her lips almost touch his hair*]. My love — yes; but this other, loftier, purer side of me — I want you to be proud of that.

LAURENCE. It is of that that I am proud. I cannot dissociate your love from your goodness; in my mind they have always been one. You have always been to me the best, the sweetest of women.

IRIS [*smiling sadly*]. Ah! ah! But before you return to claim me you must forget. [*Entreatingly.*] You will forget?

LAURENCE. Forget — and remember.

IRIS. Oh, forget, dear, more than you remember. Come to me then as if you had never known me — or known me but a little. Let us then learn each other, as it were, afresh; raise up barriers between us, for the delight of breaking them down. [*Looking into space.*] Two years — three — !

LAURENCE. They will pass quickly.

IRIS. I pray they will; and yet, for shame's sake, not too quickly. So that, when you come to marry me, you may marry —

LAURENCE. Yes?

IRIS. One who is a stranger to you.

[*The church-bells strike the half-hour. They listen with strained ears. After a pause, he rises slowly.*]

IRIS [*dully*]. What is that?

LAURENCE [*walking away from her, his head bowed*]. Half-past four, I think.

[*Other bells are heard.*]

IRIS. I have lived here — how many weeks? — and have scarcely noticed those bells —

[*She goes to him and they stand side-by-side, without speaking, their hands tightly locked.*]

LAURENCE [*after the silence, with an assumption of cheerfulness*]. I've a little over an hour — that's ample. I paid my score last night, and the porter already has my big baggage. I've only to make my toilet and throw a few things into a kit-bag. [*Rubbing his chin.*] No time for a shave, though. I wonder whether the wait at Como will be long enough to enable me to visit a barber.

IRIS [*passing her hand over his chin*]. Untidy fellow!

LAURENCE. Untidy! oh, upon the ranch —

IRIS. You won't wear beard? not a beard!

LAURENCE. It shall be removed, in any event, before — before we —

IRIS. Yes, don't you dare ever to venture into my presence —

[*They laugh together, pitifully; and, in the end, their laughter dying out, she cries unrestrainedly upon his shoulder. Then, with an effort, she leaves his side and throws open the further window. The heavy sky is now streaked with an ugly yellow bar.*]

IRIS. There are some rain-drops. Has the weather broken at last?

[*He goes mechanically to the settee on the left and fetches his hat.*]

IRIS [*coming to him and turning up the collar of his coat*]. Run, directly you get on to the road.

[*They walk to the open window.*]

LAURENCE [*looking out*]. Yes — rain. [*Huskily.*] I'm afraid you'll be — horribly dull.

IRIS. Shut the jalousies, so that the servants may find them closed. [*With clenched hands.*] Go now.

[*They embrace finally. He kisses her hands, her eyes, her lips.*]

IRIS [*in his ear*]. I have loved you. I shall love you always. I shall love you always.

[*He goes out on to the balcony, where he pauses, looking at her.*]

IRIS. Close the jalousies! shut them!

[*He closes the jalousies, she the window, and the room is once more in darkness. With a low wail, she totters to the settee in the center and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows and sobbing violently. The curtain descends — rising again almost immediately. It is now day, but the rain is falling heavily, and the lake, and the hills beyond, are obscured as if by a gray veil.* IRIS — *dressed as before — is sitting in a chair by the further window, absorbed in contemplating the dreary prospect. Her hat, cape, and gloves are on the table on the right; and on the chair which remains at the head of the settee in the center is her dressing-bag, open. The wooden case has disappeared, but the bird-cage, with its cover raised, is still upon the cabinet. The* MAN-SERVANT *enters at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT. I beg your pardon, ma'am.

IRIS [*turning*]. Eh?

MAN-SERVANT. At what hour do you desire the fly — the carriage?

IRIS [*rising*]. I am expecting Mr. Maldonado — directly he has left me. [*The* MAN *is going.*] Put the bird upon the front seat. Be careful. [*He takes up the cage, which contains a solitary canary, and is again about to depart.*] Wait.

[*The* MAN *returns, placing the cage upon the table. She goes to her dressing-bag and searches for, and finds, a small velvet sack. From this she produces, quite heedlessly, a handful of gold pieces.*]

IRIS [*throwing the little sack back into the dressing-bag*]. I shall be much obliged to you if you will distribute this among the servants, including yourself. [*Giving him the money and moving away towards the writing-table.*] I thank you all for the attention I have received here.

MAN-SERVANT [*staring at the money, which he holds in two hands.*] I — I really beg pardon, ma'am —

IRIS [*turning*]. What — ?

MAN-SERVANT. I — that is, we — we've heard — that is, we've been given to understand —

IRIS. Eh? Ah, yes. [*Graciously.*] But this is the last time I may have the privilege — [*Busying herself in collecting certain little personal objects — her diary, date-case, address-book, a stamp-box, &c., &c. — which are upon the writing-table.*] I thank you once more.

MAN-SERVANT. We — we are exceedingly grateful, ma'am.

[*Removing the cover from the bird-cage, he pours the money into it and, carrying the cage in one hand and the improvised money-bag in the other, withdraws. She takes up* LAURENCE'S *portrait and studies it fondly; then, after pressing it to her lips, she proceeds to find a place for*

it in her dressing-bag. The MAN-SERVANT *reappears.*]

MAN-SERVANT. Mr. Maldonado.

[MALDONADO — *wet and mud-splashed* — *enters briskly and comes to her.*]

IRIS [*giving him her hand*]. I have been waiting for you.

MALDONADO. I went as far as Sala in the boat; [*giving his hat to the* SERVANT] there I landed, and have tramped back.

IRIS. Maldo! You are drenched!

MALDONADO. Tsch!

[*He slips out of the cloak he is wearing and hands that also to the* SERVANT, *who finally retires.*]

IRIS [*gratefully*]. You have been true to your promise.

MALDONADO [*triumphantly*]. A'ha!

IRIS. Rising betimes, upon such a morning!

MALDONADO [*laughingly*]. I was on my balcony at four o'clock, watching the dawn.

IRIS [*turning away and sitting in the chair by the writing-table*]. The dawn — ?

MALDONADO [*pulling off his wet gloves*]. I was restless — I suppose because I knew I had your business on hand. Before five I was outside the *Britannia,* throwing stones at Laurie's window. We had coffee together, he and I, and then, arm-and-arm, made for the pier.

IRIS. Poor boy! Was he very downcast?

MALDONADO. His heart was heavy enough, doubtless, but — [*with a shrug*] at eight-and-twenty, a new world ahead of you —

IRIS. Naturally.

MALDONADO. Phew! [*Seating himself upon the settee in the center.*] Never heeding the rain, we paced the deck of the little steamer unceasingly. How time flies, when there is a common point of interest between two men! Our theme? Need I say we talk of you, of nothing but you, my dear Iris — our friend, our mistress, our goddess — ?

IRIS [*gently protesting*]. Hush!

MALDONADO. Ha, ha, ha! no. Now I reflect upon it, I believe I appropriated rather more than my fair share of the conversation. On certain topics, when once I am set going — ha! —

IRIS. I am sure you cheered and amused him.

MALDONADO. Ultimately I was put ashore, and the boat went off without me — went off hooting into the wet fog — and I was left staring at the particular patch of cloud that had engulfed her. Upon my soul, I think I was the more cut up of the two — no, that's exaggeration, of course. But the mental picture of the lonely lady of this villa — at her bed-room window, eh? — her eyes trying to pierce the mist — the mist of her tears and of the beastly, sodden air —

[*He rises abruptly, and goes to the further window and looks out. She wipes her tears away with her handkerchief. After a moment or two he comes to her and lays a hand upon her shoulder consolingly.*]

IRIS. The last word he spoke — tell me —

MALDONADO. Unfortunately, at Sala there was some confusion over his luggage and he was called from my side; so he had no opportunity — dear chap! — of sending a final message.

IRIS [*disappointed*]. Ah!

MALDONADO. But it's not difficult to surmise what its purport would have been. [*Looking at his watch.*] Not difficult, at any rate, for a poor devil who is also compelled to wrench himself away from you.

IRIS. You, Maldo?

MALDONADO. I, too, make my plunge into the mist this morning. I am driving to Porlezza, to pick up the afternoon train at Lugano.

IRIS [*rising*]. You go to London?

MALDONADO. To Brussels and Paris. I have received some upbraiding telegrams from our houses there.

IRIS. Ah, you have wasted so much of your time with us.

MALDONADO. Wasted!

IRIS. Bestowed so much of your time upon us, I will say.

MALDONADO [*stroking his beard*]. I

was determined, at all costs, to see the end of poor Laurence.

Iris [*with a pathetic pucker of her mouth*]. And Fanny and Croker to-morrow! And I—I at the little *Pension* at Tremezzo.

Maldonado. Picturesque, dirty Tremezzo, with its thousand odors! That reminds me—before I wish you good-bye—[*running his hand over the outside of his pockets*]—tsch! Have I left it at the hotel?—no, here it is—

[*He produces, from his breast-pocket, an unused cheque-book and carelessly turns its leaves.*]

Iris. What is that?

Maldonado. Before I say good-bye, let me explain why I leave this in your keeping.

Iris [*instinctively shrinking a little*]. A cheque-book?

Maldonado. My reason is this. I have presumed—ah, don't be too indignant with me—to pay into my bank, to your account—to the account of Iris Bellamy—

Iris. No, no!

Maldonado. I am humbly conscious that I appear to be opposing your wishes in doing what I have done.

Iris. Deliberately opposing them, Maldo.

Maldonado. What a terribly censorious expression! Well, if the amount were anything very considerable, there would, perhaps, be some justification for it.

Iris. I have already explained—

Maldonado. But a few hundred pounds—a thousand or so—

Iris. Oh, Maldo!

Maldonado. As a small reserve in the event of your being pressed by a debt—a debt overlooked in the general settlement—

Iris. Please—!

Maldonado. Or your feeling unhappy at Tremezzo, or elsewhere—

Iris [*touching his arm, appealingly*]. Maldo—

Maldonado. Poverty abounds in unpleasant surprises.

Iris. Maldo! Maldo!

Maldonado. Eh?

Iris. Don't think me horribly ungracious. Indeed, indeed, I am full of gratitude to you, my dear friend. But upon the question of accepting help—money—I am firm; I am as hard as adamant. You must not, therefore, consider me unkind—

Maldonado. If you don't honor me by drawing a single cheque? My dear, I assure you I shall never trouble to enquire whether you had recourse to this paltry little fund at my bank or not. [*Bitterly.*] So, in this instance, you will be less cruel to me than to yourself.

Iris [*weakly*]. You *are* hurt. I am always paining you; it seems to be my special misfortune.

Maldonado. Pish! throw the thing into your writing-case and forget it.

[*He passes her and throws the cheque-book upon the writing-table.*]

Iris. I would prefer that the book were not even left with me, Maldo.

Maldonado [*sarcastically*]. Oh, pray! Won't you at least do me the favor of burning it? May I not beg that indulgence of you?

Iris [*in distress*]. Certainly, I'll destroy it.

Maldonado [*with elaborate politeness*]. My most profound acknowledgments!

Iris [*taking his hand*]. Ah, don't, don't! [*Coaxingly.*] In a day or two I will write you a letter—a letter—

Maldonado. For small mercies—!

Iris. Oh, why be angry with me? What have I done? Maldo! Maldo! Maldo!

Maldonado [*looking into her eyes*]. It is impossible to be cross with you for more than a moment. There! I forgive you.

Iris. Ah!

Maldonado. This—and the rest. Adieu!

Iris. Adieu!

[*He kisses her hands, rather too warmly. She goes to the door and pulls the bell-rope.*]

Maldonado. Let me see—you transfer yourself to Varese—?

Iris. Next month. I think.

Maldonado [*lightly but with inten-*

tion]. Is Varese pleasant in November, I wonder?

IRIS [*unconsciously*]. Very, they tell me.

MALDONADO. Tsch! I fear I mustn't indulge myself in another holiday yet awhile.

IRIS [*as before*]. No? You rich men work like slaves, Maldo.

MALDONADO. Ha! what else is there in life?

[*He pauses a little longer, waiting for some further response from her. Receiving none, he looks at his watch again hurriedly.*]

MALDONADO. I must be off. Good-bye.

IRIS [*raising her head*]. Good-bye, Maldo.

[*He goes out. At the same moment* AUREA *appears outside the further window and, after looking into the room, raps upon the window-pane.*]

IRIS [*turning*]. Ah! [*Opening the window.*] Aurea!

AUREA. Good morning! here's a day!

IRIS. Come in.

[AUREA, *who carries an umbrella, enters, brightly and eagerly.*]

IRIS [*closing the window*]. What brings you out into the rain? [*Patting her cheeks.*] To water the roses?

AUREA. As we go to-morrow, I thought I might not have another opportunity of seeing you alone. You have always been so sweet to me—

IRIS [*kissing her.*] Ah!

AUREA. Aunt Fanny says I am to be most careful to avoid sad subjects when I meet you, and to be bright and cheerful.

IRIS. She is right.

AUREA. So I've come to talk solely about myself. I want you to be the first—the very first—to hear my news.

IRIS. News?

AUREA [*in a voice full of mystery*]. It's a dead secret. I shan't breathe a word of it to aunt until the business is absolutely settled.

IRIS. Business—? I'm waiting.

AUREA [*laughing gleefully*]. Ha, ha, ha! Let me get rid of my umbrella. [*Resting her umbrella against the table on the right and returning to* IRIS *with an air of importance.*] Now then! What do you think, dear Mrs. Bellamy! I've a prospect of being able to make myself independent of my relations.

IRIS. Really!

AUREA. Yes, positively. You know, while Aunt Fanny could afford to have me with her, my position was just endurable. But now—well, I can't expect to find the world full of Aunt Fannies, can I?

IRIS. Tell me—

AUREA. It's all through Miss Pinsent.

IRIS. Kate Pinsent?

AUREA [*nodding*]. Whom I met at your house at Kensington. You remember your lovely dinner-party?

IRIS [*looking away*]. Perfectly.

AUREA. We struck up a great friendship that night, Miss Pinsent and I. I wrote to her when we first heard of aunt's reverse, mentioning how I was situated. She's a dear!

IRIS [*turning from* AUREA]. Yes. I am afraid I didn't treat her very considerately.

AUREA. I'm certain you did; you do everybody. She adores you; so does everybody. [*In an outburst.*] We are going into business!

IRIS. You and Kate!

AUREA. That is, *she* is going into business, if she can overcome initial difficulties, and I am to be allowed to join her. [*Dropping upon the settee in the center.*] Isn't it exciting?

IRIS. You enterprising little woman! [*Advancing to her.*] Difficulties? What difficulties?

AUREA. She has to find three or four hundred pounds, to decorate and fit up the rooms. [*With enjoyment.*] The rooms! Four rooms; two on the first floor, and two on the second, where the girls will work—

IRIS [*standing facing* AUREA *and looking down upon her*]. But Kate *has* money.

AUREA [*shaking her head*]. No. And her mother to maintain! Isn't it rough?

IRIS [*insistently*]. She saved money; she saved it with me—in my service. I know it.

AUREA. Oh, yes — but that went.

IRIS. Went — ?

AUREA. Mr. Kane had it.

IRIS [*sitting beside* AUREA]. Kane!

AUREA. Poor girl! she used to talk to him when he came to your house —

IRIS. Of course.

AUREA. And one day she asked him to invest her savings for her.

IRIS. Gone — !

AUREA [*nodding*]. Dreadfully hard lines! But she's awfully dogged, and if she can only induce somebody to stand by her over this undertaking —

IRIS. Poor Kate! Fancy the avalanche crushing her too! A nice creature.

AUREA. I'm certain she'll manage it somehow; she swears she'll move heaven and earth before she owns beat.

IRIS [*thoughtfully, with knit brows*]. That's all very well. If she doesn't — if she can't — ?

AUREA. Oh, don't suggest that, Mrs. Bellamy! don't, don't suggest that!

[IRIS *rises and slowly walks towards the writing-table, while* AUREA, *not following her movements, rattles on emphatically.*]

AUREA. Surely, surely there are plenty of generous, wealthy people who will lend a helping hand to a woman. Kate has tried for another situation as companion, such as she held with you, and has failed. The salaries offered are impossible; there's but one Mrs. Bellamy on earth, she says — all the rest are in heaven. Oh, it would be too cruel if this chance escaped her — cruel on her and on me. Me! I believe I shall break my heart if it falls through. I think of nothing else, dream of nothing else — talk of nothing else, you'll say —

[IRIS *is now seated, quite composedly, before the writing-table, drawing a cheque in* MALDONADO'S *cheque-book.*]

IRIS. Hush! hush! I'm writing.

AUREA [*rising*]. I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

[IRIS *carefully extracts the cheque from the book and blots it, and, taking an envelope from the table, rises and comes to* AUREA.]

IRIS [*folding the cheque*]. Aurea, this little gift will put an end to those initial difficulties you speak of. Send it to your friend at once, with my good wishes.

AUREA [*staring at the cheque as* IRIS *encloses it in the envelope*]. Oh — !

IRIS [*giving the envelope to* AUREA]. Say that I am sincerely sorry I dismissed her so unkindly — so abruptly.

AUREA [*breathlessly*]. Mrs. Bellamy — dear Mrs. Bellamy — you — *you* mustn't attempt to do this for us!

IRIS. It delights me to render this service — the last, perhaps, I shall ever render anybody.

AUREA. But how — how *can* you — ?

IRIS [*looking down*]. I — I have unexpectedly come into possession of a — a trifling — [*uneasily*] Er — not a word, please, to your aunt.

AUREA. N — no.

IRIS. And, Aurea — mind! — you must put Kate Pinsent upon her honor — her word of honor — never to let a soul know —

[*The* MAN-SERVANT *enters at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT. The carriage is here, ma'am.

IRIS [*to* AUREA]. Shall I give you a lift as far as the Belle Vue?

AUREA [*in a low voice*]. Aunt might wonder and put awkward questions.

IRIS [*with a glance of assent*]. I am to see you both at Tremezzo this afternoon?

AUREA. Yes.

IRIS [*to the* SERVANT]. Come back for my bag when you have let Miss Vyse out.

MAN-SERVANT. Yes, ma'am.

AUREA [*throwing her arms round* IRIS'S *neck*]. Oh! oh!

[*She snatches up her umbrella and runs away. The* SERVANT *goes after her. With a troubled, half-guilty look,* IRIS *attires herself in her hat and cape; after which, carrying her gloves, she returns to her dressing-bag. Glancing round the room, to assure herself that she has collected all her small personal belongings,*

her eyes rest on the cheque-book which lies open on the writing-table. She contemplates it for a time, a gradually increasing fear showing itself in her face. Ultimately she walks slowly to the table and picks up the book. She is fingering it in an uncertain, frightened way when the SERVANT *returns.*]

MAN-SERVANT [*standing over the bag*]. Is there anything more, ma'am — ?

[*She hesitates, helplessly; then, becoming conscious that she is being stared at, she advances, drops the book into the bag, and passes out. The* MAN *shuts the bag, and is following her as the curtain falls.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene represents a room in a Flat at the West End of London. The decorations are in delicate tints of pink and green touched with silver, and the furniture is correspondingly light and dainty. The fireplace, where a fire is burning, is in the center of the wall furthest from the spectator. On one side of the fireplace — the left — is a door admitting to a bedroom; on the other side a door opening from the hall. A silken portière hangs over the bedroom door. In the wall on the right there is a deep recess in which is fitted a luxurious divan, and beyond this recess is a third door leading to another apartment. On the left-hand side of the room a bow window, provided with cushioned seats, gives a view of the houses on the opposite side of the street. A writing-table, chair, and waste-paper basket stand near the window; on either side of the fireplace is an arm-chair; and in the center of the room there is a circular table on which breakfast is laid tastefully for one person. On the left of the breakfast-table is a chair, and on the right a settee with a little table behind it. Other articles of furniture, all pretty and fragile, are arranged about the room.

The light is that of a clear morning in winter.

[IRIS — *dressed in a handsome morning-robe — is seated at the table in the center a book propped-up before her, neglecting her breakfast. Her beauty has matured — become severer, more majestic; and her face has somewhat hardened. A gray lock, however, upon her brow, from which the hair is now taken back, gives a softening note. The door on the right of the fireplace — the door admitting from the hall — opens, and* MALDONADO *enters with the air of a man who is thoroughly at home. He is without his hat but is still gloved. He comes to the right of the table and looks down upon her.*]

MALDONADO. Morning.

[*She barely raises her eyes from her book. With a shrug, he seats himself in the chair on the right of the fireplace and pulls off his gloves.*]

MALDONADO. Devilish cold. [*A pause.*] Your breakfast gets later and later. The hours you waste!

IRIS [*mechanically stirring her tea*]. I have nothing to do.

MALDONADO. You do nothing.

[*Having taken a cigarette from his case, he searches for matches upon the mantelpiece. Not finding them, he goes to the writing-table. There he comes upon a match-stand and lights his cigarette.*]

MALDONADO [*at the writing-table*]. The matches are never in the same place two days running.

IRIS [*icily*]. Frederick —

MALDONADO. Eh?

IRIS. I wish you would make it a practice to send your name in, instead of using a latch-key.

MALDONADO. Why?

IRIS. It would appear a little more respectful to me in the eyes of the servants, would it not? It's of no consequence.

[*After some hesitation, he produces a bunch of keys and removes from it a latch-key. Weighing the key in his hand meditatively, he walks towards the settee; then he turns and tosses the key upon the table.*]

Iris. Thanks.

Maldonado [*sitting upon the settee*]. Anything to satisfy you, my dear.

[*She picks up the key and, rising, drops it into a vase which stands upon the mantelpiece. The key strikes the bottom of the vase with a sharp sound. Having done this she resumes her seat and sips her tea.*]

Maldonado [*examining his nails*]. I particularly hoped to find you in an agreeable humor this morning. I wonder whether I can put you in one. Don't read. [*She lays her book aside.*] Iris.

Iris. Well?

Maldonado. I was turning matters over in my mind last week in Paris. Honestly, I'm no more content with the present condition of affairs than you are.

Iris. Than I am? I'm not aware that I have expressed any special discontent.

Maldonado [*with a short laugh*]. Ha! Upon my soul, you have the knack of freezing a man.

Iris. What is it you have to propose, Frederick?

Maldonado [*leaning forward, his elbows on his knees*]. Iris, I want to invite you to come round the corner—to Mount Street.

Iris. To Mount Street?

Maldonado. To my house—in a settled position.

Iris [*indifferently*]. Oh?

Maldonado. Do you remember our talk of two years ago last summer, on the occasion of that dinner-party at your place, when you declared your willingness to do your duty as my wife, as mistress of my establishment, squarely and faithfully. You sold me then—a subject we won't enlarge on. Well, there hangs the old Velasquez still, and the Raphael, and the Murillo, and once more I offer to frame you gorgeously and to place you along with them; making you permanently—what was my phrase?—"mine to gaze at, mine to keep from others." What d'you say?

Iris [*after a pause*]. Why *now*?

Maldonado. Why now?

Iris. Yes; why now?

Maldonado. I—I've treated you a bit roughly, you mean?

[*She rises, with an eloquent gesture, and goes to the chair on the left of the fireplace, where she sits.*]

Maldonado. Oh, I own up. I intended to have my revenge, if I could get it, and I've had it. Yes, I meant it.

Iris [*writhing*]. Oh!

Maldonado. I repeat, I own up. I make a clean breast of it, you see—as an inducement to you to wipe the slate.

Iris. It *was* deliberate, then, from the very first—cruelly deliberate?

Maldonado [*with a nod*]. I'll even beg pardon, if it would please you.

Iris. Your arrival at Cadenabbia, from Aix—?

Maldonado. I'd heard you were traveling with that pup-dog at your heels—

Iris. Of whom are you speaking?

Maldonado. Sorry—Trenwith. And I wanted to be sure; I couldn't credit it. You! To throw me over when I'd won you honorably—shove me aside, after my long waiting, at the moment of my success, for a lover! It kept me awake; I wasn't sleeping. That brought me to Cadenabbia.

Iris [*musingly*]. I've often wondered.

Maldonado. Ha! I believe I came by the same train that carried the newspapers containing the account of Kane's bolting. There was an opening at once—

Iris. To play the friend, the consoling friend—ah!—

Maldonado [*after a pause, moodily*]. Anything more?

Iris. What would you have done if events had not shaped themselves in your favor—if Mr. Trenwith and I had not parted?

Maldonado. I don't know—frankly. It gives me the shivers sometimes—the mere conjecture. There were days at Aix when I felt mad.

Iris [*with a long-drawn sigh*]. Ah—h—h!

MALDONADO. Eh?

IRIS. I wish you had been merciful and had taken me out on to the lake and drowned me.

MALDONADO. Ugh!

IRIS. That cheque-book — you were sure I'd avail myself of it?

MALDONADO. I was pretty certain you couldn't drag on for long upon a few pounds a week. *You* couldn't.

IRIS [*satirically*]. How mad you were!

MALDONADO. And as your careering-about abroad, with a young gentleman in attendance, had alienated the friends who could have aided you, I calculated the chances were all my way.

IRIS. The chances of your being able to destroy me utterly —

MALDONADO. The chances of crying quits with Trenwith.

IRIS [*clenching her hands*]. Oh, don't — don't — !

MALDONADO [*after another pause*]. Anything more?

[*She is silent. He rises and goes to the fireplace, where he stands, his back to the fire, contemplating her.*]

MALDONADO. You're not over keen about my suggestion, apparently.

IRIS. I!

MALDONADO. I fancied you'd be glad. Upon my soul, I imagined you'd be rather — gratified.

IRIS [*rising and standing beside him, composedly*]. I am sorry if you are disappointed. I'm afraid I've no longer the capacity for being gratified at anything. I haven't it; it's gone.

MALDONADO. It's odd that, somehow, whenever the question of marriage has arisen between us, you've always contrived to make me look an ass in my own eyes.

IRIS [*languidly*]. Need you regard it in that way?

MALDONADO. Look here, Iris! you must at least see that I desire to make it up to you — desire to make amends. Surely that flatters you, if ever so slightly. You used the word "respect" a minute ago. Does this look as if I entertained no respect for you? [*Between his teeth.*] I'm d— I mean, I can't understand you.

IRIS. Amends? What amends can you make me?

MALDONADO. Isn't marriage amends?

IRIS [*trifling with the flowers on the breakfast-table*]. It's too late, I tell you. I'm down, beyond recovery. I've lost heart. I no longer care. I'm shunned like poison —

MALDONADO [*behind her shoulder*]. People cut you? You mustn't blame me wholly for that.

IRIS. I don't. I'm not unfair. And it isn't that which hurts me most even now. [*Closing her eyes.*] But to shun *one's self* — to cut *one's self* — ! No, no; it's all over with me — everything's over. Marriage! a farce!

[*She passes him and walks away to the head of the settee. He follows her.*]

MALDONADO. At any rate, in talking in this fashion, you take only one point of view. There's another.

IRIS. Yours? Oh, yes, there's your point of view. But why on earth should *you* wish to marry *me?*

MALDONADO. Is it a novel wish on my part?

IRIS. No; but bruised fruit —

MALDONADO [*seizing her hands*]. Can't you be less bitter? Listen to me! listen to me!

IRIS [*freeing herself and leaning against the head of the settee, facing him*]. I am doing so.

MALDONADO. You'll laugh at me — no, that's not your way; you'll stab me with those steel-gray eyes of yours, tighten your lips till the sight of their thin red line stings me like whip-cord. All the same, you've got to hear it — I love you. I love you more than ever, my dear. What's in you? You're extraordinary. By the common rule of life I ought to be chafing to be rid of you; the fizz should have gone entirely out of what remains of the liquor by this time. But it's not so. I say it's wonderful, considering what's behind us, that we should stand here as we do — I again entreating you to be my wife, still entreating you, as I did two years back, for a soft word, a spark of warmth, just a little tenderness. [*Gripping her shoulders and looking into her face so closely that she*

shrinks back.] I shall never be able to do without you, Iris; you grow on a man — never be able to spare you. The idea of your wanting to break away from me one day is insupportable. What did I ask you to call me, that night in Kensington — Beloved? Fool! And yet this morning, notwithstanding all that has passed since then, I'd give half of everything I have in the world if you'd speak that word. I will give it; I lay it at your feet. Iris! [*Drawing her to him.*] Iris! you devil in marble!

[*There is a silence between them for a moment or two, neither stirring. Then she gently disengages herself and moves away to the writing-table.*]

MALDONADO [*following her with his eyes*]. Well — ?

IRIS. I — I will think about it.

MALDONADO [*passing his hand across his brow*]. Think about it — ? Think about it! [*Going towards her.*] Oh, yes. [*Suddenly.*] You haven't heard from that fellow lately, have you?

IRIS. Mr. Trenwith?

MALDONADO. Mister Trenwith.

IRIS. No.

MALDONADO. Nor written to him? [*She shakes her head.*] When did you last write?

IRIS. It doesn't matter.

MALDONADO [*fiercely*]. When?

IRIS [*weakly*]. Four months ago — or five. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] I forget exactly.

MALDONADO. And he?

IRIS. He continued his letters for a time, reproaching me for forgetting him. They have ceased — ceased.

MALDONADO. You are sure?

IRIS. Sure? Quite sure.

[*She breaks down and cries. He watches her for a while, then turns from her and sits at the breakfast-table.*]

MALDONADO [*digging a fork into the table-cloth viciously*]. Will you come to a theater to-night?

IRIS [*wiping her eyes*]. If you wish it.

MALDONADO. Dine somewhere beforehand?

IRIS. As you please.

MALDONADO. Where?

IRIS. Anywhere.

MALDONADO. What theater? [*A pause.*] What theater?

[*There are some unopened newspapers upon the little table behind the settee. She crosses over to the table and picks up one of them. She is unfolding it when he comes to her.*]

MALDONADO [*at her side*]. How long will it take you to make up your mind?

IRIS [*dully*]. About the theater?

MALDONADO. No, no; about our marriage.

IRIS. A week; let me have a week. [*Sitting upon the settee.*] There can be no necessity for haste.

MALDONADO [*discontentedly*]. A week? Pish! [*Leaning against the breakfast-table.*] However, we'll say a week.

IRIS [*gazing listlessly before her, the paper falling to the floor*]. If we do marry, you must promise not to insist upon my continuing to live in England.

MALDONADO. Why?

IRIS. There would be a revival of interest in me, as your wife. Heaps of those who have dropped me, half-forgotten me — who wouldn't touch me, as I am, with gloves on — would rally round me because of your wealth. I couldn't suffer that.

MALDONADO. I shouldn't ask you to.

IRIS. What! you and I alone, then, in that great house in Mount Street! No, no; not England, if we marry.

MALDONADO. All right. So be it. [*With a shrug.*] We can easily take down the Velasquez and hang him elsewhere. After all, England is a paradise only for the puritan and the hypocrite. [*His spirits rising.*] Ha, ha! Farewell, England! Land of lean women and smug men, of the drooping eyelid and the sanctimonious drawl! Land of money-worship, of cant and pharisaism, of false sentiment and namby-pamby ideals — in every department of life, the suburb of the universe! Ha, ha, ha! England, farewell! [*Advancing to her.*] Paris?

IRIS. The women there are so terrible — the women who would claim equality with me.

MALDONADO. One must live somewhere.

IRIS [*wearily*]. That's it; that's it.

MALDONADO. And yet, why reside anywhere? Who so at home everywhere as the homeless rich? We'll be cosmopolitans of the first order, shall we? [*Bending over her.*] Why, I'd carry Velasquez and his companions on my back, from city to city, if you'd walk beside me with your hand in mine. [*Holding out his hand.*] Ah, sweetest!

IRIS [*looking up at him, with an expressionless face, and laying her hand in his*]. You are not all bad, Maldo.

[*There is a knock at the door and* IRIS *rises. They separate; she goes to the writing-table, he to the fireplace.*]

IRIS. Come!

[*A* WOMAN-SERVANT *enters, from the hall.*]

SERVANT. Mr. Harrington.

IRIS [*seated at the writing-table*]. I'll see him.

[*The* SERVANT *withdraws, closing the door.*]

MALDONADO [*with a wry face*]. Tsch! you don't mind being bored. He's become too sour and grumpy for words, this chap. You know they've kicked him out of the secretaryship of that club? How the devil he lives — !

[*The* SERVANT *returns, showing in* CROKER HARRINGTON. CROKER *has lost his smartness — is almost shabby — and has aged out of proportion to the time that has elapsed. He stands regarding* MALDONADO *with an expression approaching a scowl. The servant retires.*]

MALDONADO [*with a nod*]. Good morning.

CROKER. Good morning.

[*He comes to* IRIS *and shakes hands with her silently.*]

MALDONADO [*leaving the fire*]. You were at the wedding yesterday, I suppose, my dear Croker?

CROKER [*surlily*]. Yes.

MALDONADO. And you come fully charged with all the delightful details, eh?

IRIS. I hope so.

MALDONADO. Miss Sylvain — a tolerably mature bride. I sent her a wedding present — which she had the impudence to return. [*To* IRIS, *as he moves towards the door on the right.*] May I write two or three letters here, while you chat to our friend?

IRIS. Why do you ask me?

MALDONADO [*at the door*]. Do decide about the theater.

[*He goes, leaving the door ajar.* IRIS *crosses over to the door and peeps into the adjoining room.*]

IRIS [*closing the door softly*]. He has gone into the further room. We can talk freely. [*She motions* CROKER *to sit upon the settee; he obeys her. Then she brings the chair from the left of the breakfast-table and sits, facing him eagerly.*] How did she look?

CROKER. Well.

IRIS. Sweet?

CROKER [*nodding*]. H'm.

IRIS. The bridesmaids — were there many?

CROKER. Four.

IRIS. Four?

CROKER. Evelyn Littledale —

IRIS. Of course.

CROKER. Margot Cowley —

IRIS. She!

CROKER. Her niece —

IRIS. Aurea? Oh, yes — the girl I was rather fond of.

CROKER. And a sister of the bridegroom.

IRIS. Was the church well-filled? The Wynnings — were they present? The Chadwicks? the Saddingtons? the Vanes? the Glenne-Smiths? [*He nods in response to each inquiry.*] Oh, I knew them all! [*She weeps again, then recovers herself and dries her eyes.*] Well! *exit* Fanny! I passed her, the other day, in Davies Street. I saw her first in the distance, and put back my veil so that she should notice my white lock. Sorrow and remorse have their egotism, as ease and joy have, and I am proud of my gray hair. But she purposely kept her eyes down.

CROKER [*brusquely*]. Perhaps — in time —

IRIS. Never — with a husband. That

hope's gone. You're the last. And you've altered towards me.

CROKER [*sternly*]. Altered! What do you expect?

IRIS [*with her habitual pathetic little twist of her mouth*]. No, I must have disappointed you sadly. Do you recollect describing to me once, in the Kensington days, your ideal of woman? It was at the time you were —

CROKER. Perfectly.

IRIS. You said you asked nothing more of a woman — what? —

CROKER. Than that she should be beautiful to the eye and gentle to the ear; that her face should brighten when I entered, her hand linger in mine when I departed; that she should never allow me to hear her speak slightingly of any honest man, thereby assuring me she indulged in no contemptuous criticism of me when I was out of her company; that she should be bountiful to the poor, unafraid of the sick and unsightly, fond of dumb animals and strange children, and tearful in the presence of fine pictures and at the sound of rich music.

IRIS. And I inspired that!

CROKER. You did.

IRIS [*with a sigh*]. How vain I felt! And yet — by chance, I suppose — never anticipating! — you left out something — something essential — that goes to the making of a perfect woman?

CROKER. To the making of a good woman — yes.

IRIS [*wincing*]. Sssh! sssh!

[*Bending forward, she lays her head upon his knees. So she remains for a few moments, both silent, he looking down upon her.*]

CROKER [*in a low voice*]. Iris — [*She sobs.*] There is one other item of news I have to give you — not connected with Fanny's wedding —

IRIS [*inarticulately*]. Yes?

CROKER. You will have no difficulty in guessing it, I fancy.

IRIS. Eh?

CROKER. The inevitable has happened. I've always warned you.

[*She raises her head slowly and stares at him. Reading his news in his face, she rises.*]

IRIS. Back?

[*He answers her with his eyes. She sways and he catches her by the arm and assists her to the settee.*]

CROKER. It occurred late last night. I turned into a little restaurant in Soho — an old resort of his, it appears — for my supper. He came in; we stared at one another for a moment — then he rushed at me. His ship had docked at Liverpool earlier in the day and he had just driven from Euston. I pretended that I had finished eating, and, after a brief talk, got away.

IRIS [*her eyes closed*]. How does he bear it?

CROKER. He's mystified; believes some one has come between you and him; and is here to find out the facts.

[*She opens her eyes and looks at him dully; then she suddenly sits upright.*]

IRIS. He — he doesn't know, then?

CROKER. No. [*She struggles to her feet.*] And I was careful that he should extract nothing from me.

IRIS. He has not heard — not heard — !

[*She moves about the room in an agitated, aimless way, sitting in one place only to rise immediately and transfer herself to another, and uttering brief, half-articulate comments as* CROKER *proceeds.*]

CROKER. I allowed him to understand that your friendship for me had somewhat cooled —

IRIS. Cooled — ?

CROKER. In order that he shouldn't be puzzled by my unusual ignorance concerning you.

IRIS. Ah, yes.

CROKER. "That's it, Harrington!" he said, "she is being drawn away from her friends. By whom?"

IRIS. Ah!

CROKER. He wanted information, naturally, as to your whereabouts. You had returned to London, I told him, but — how stupid of me! — I couldn't recall the name of the street in which you are lodging. Ha!

IRIS. Well?

CROKER. He has gone to an hotel in

Villiers Street. I have undertaken to hunt-up your address [*referring to his watch*] and to let him have it during the morning.

IRIS [*pausing, confusedly*]. And — and will you?

CROKER. Not without your authority to do so. My object was simply to stop him, for a few hours, from busying himself in making enquiries —

IRIS [*nodding, faintly*]. Enquiries —

CROKER. Thinking you might wish to be before others with your story.

IRIS [*coming to him and grasping his hands*]. Ah! ah! ah!

CROKER [*grimly*]. In the meantime he is occupied feverishly at his tailors and haberdashers, I expect.

IRIS. What shall I do, Croker? What course shall I adopt? Quick! We shall be interrupted directly. Oh, help me, please!

CROKER [*harshly*]. Excuse me; the rest is with you. I regret I don't feel able to advise you.

[*He turns from her and walks away to the fireplace, where he stands looking into the fire.*]

IRIS [*weakly*]. Ah, that's unkind — unkind — !

[*She drops into the chair before the writing-table and sits for a time, her elbows on the table, tightly holding her brows. Then she seizes a pen and writes rapidly upon a sheet of note-paper.*]

IRIS [*while she writes*]. Croker — Croker —

[*He returns to her slowly. When she has finished her note, she scrawls a name upon an envelope and rises.* CROKER *is at her side; she holds the note before him.*]

CROKER [*as he reads it*]. You will see him to-night at nine o'clock —

IRIS. Yes.

CROKER. If he can come to you with pity in his heart.

IRIS [*folding the note with trembling hands*]. You will take this to him?

CROKER [*between his teeth*]. I! Oh, yes.

IRIS [*enclosing the note*]. At once — at once —

CROKER. Ho, certainly! at once.

IRIS [*looking at him in surprise*]. Croker!

CROKER. Having lied for you plentifully to one [*with a glance in* MALDONADO'S *direction*] I am now employed to deceive the other. Have you any further degradation for me? How much lower is my insane devotion to bring me? — tell me that! tell me that!

IRIS. Dear friend!

CROKER. Degradation! yes. A hanger-on! a complacent hanger-on! And to-day the common go-between! Ah, you have crushed the life, the spirit, the manhood out of me!

IRIS. Oh!

CROKER [*holding out his hand for the letter*]. But give it to me.

IRIS [*after a pause*]. No; I'll not.

CROKER. Come! I daresay I'm brutal. And, perhaps, a little jealous! Jealous! There! what an admission! what a depth for a man to touch! [*Still holding out his hand.*] Come, give it to me. [*Meekly.*] This is the first time I've protested, at any rate.

IRIS. You are right. I ought not to have asked you — [*tearing up the note.*] I — I beg your pardon.

[*She throws the pieces into the waste-paper basket and, passing* CROKER, *seats herself upon the settee. He sinks into the chair by the writing-table, burying his head in his hands.*]

IRIS [*staring at the carpet*]. Besides, it would be a dreadful confession to make to him personally — [*with a look, under her brows, round the room*] here, too. You haven't told me the name of the hotel — in Villiers Street, did you say? I'll do what you urged me to do at first; I'll endeavor to put it all on paper — to put everything on paper —

[*A door slams in the distance.*]

CROKER [*raising his head*]. Maldonado — !

[*She collects herself and picks up the newspaper.*]

CROKER [*rising and going over to her quickly — speaking in low, hurried tones*]. Iris, forget my boorishness. He shall be with you to-night at nine.

[*She grasps at his arm as he leaves her. He is at the door leading to the hall when* MALDONADO *returns carrying some freshly-written letters.*]

MALDONADO [*to* CROKER]. Hullo! you going?

CROKER. Yes.

MALDONADO. Ta-ta!

[CROKER *disappears, closing the door behind him.*]

MALDONADO [*at the fireplace*]. Where is he off to, in such a hurry—the workhouse? There's a man who knew half London; now he hasn't a friend in the world, excepting yourself.

IRIS [*mutteringly*]. Except myself.

MALDONADO. Eh? [*Advancing to her.*] Still hunting for that theater?

IRIS. Theater—?

MALDONADO. The theater—to-night—

IRIS [*with a catch in her breath*]. To-night—?

MALDONADO. Didn't we arrange—? Aren't you well, my dear?

IRIS [*rising—speaking hesitatingly and painfully*]. Maldo—the—the week that I am to be allowed—the week—

MALDONADO. Week—?

IRIS. The week in which to consider your—your proposal—

MALDONADO. Oh, yes.

IRIS. I wish you would leave me entirely alone in the meanwhile—not see me—not come near me—

MALDONADO [*his eyes blazing*]. Have you been consulting Harrington?

IRIS. No. No, no.

MALDONADO. Haven't you?

IRIS. I have not mentioned the matter to him—not given him a hint—

MALDONADO [*after a pause*]. What, are you afraid that my fascinating presence would unduly influence your decision?

[*She is silent, her hands twitching at the newspaper. There is a further pause.*]

MALDONADO. Oh, very well. You shall have a perfectly quiet time, if you desire it. I shall go down, then, this afternoon to Rubenstein's, at Bream Park, for a few days.

IRIS. Th—thanks. Thanks.

[*She walks away to the divan and throws herself upon it, settling herself in its cushions, with her back towards him, and making a show of reading the newspaper.*]

MALDONADO. Have you any postage-stamps?

IRIS [*as she arranges herself upon the divan*]. You will find them in my stamp-box.

[*He seats himself at the writing-table, discovers the stamp-box, and proceeds to affix stamps to his letters. While he is thus occupied, his eye is attracted by the writing upon certain scraps of paper lying near the waste-paper basket. They are fragments of* IRIS'S *note—some of which have fallen into the basket, others upon the floor. He picks up two or three of these pieces and examines them. Then he turns his head sharply and looks at* IRIS. *Seeing that she is not observing him, he hurriedly collects the pieces remaining upon the floor and also those in the basket. Humming an air to disguise his proceedings, he hastily fits the scraps together upon the table; after which he sweeps them into a heap and thrusts them into his waistcoat-pocket.*]

MALDONADO [*rising*]. Papers are dull this morning?

IRIS. Very.

[*Resuming his humming, he puts his letters away in the tail of his coat and moves stealthily towards the mantelpiece. There he takes down a vase, shakes it against his ear, and replaces it. He repeats the process with another vase, this time with success; whereupon, first pulling up his coat-sleeve and shirt-cuff, he inserts his hand and arm into the vase and regains possession of his latch-key. Pocketing the key, he breaks off from his singing and, with an evil look upon his face, comes to* IRIS.]

MALDONADO. This day week?

IRIS [*giving him a hand without turning*]. Yes.

[*He leaves her as the curtain falls.*]

[END OF THE FOURTH ACT.]

THE FIFTH ACT

The scene is unchanged. It is night-time. The electric light, softened by shades of rose-colored silk, diffuses a warm glow over the room.

[*The room is empty. There is a knock at the door on the right of the fireplace. The knock is repeated; then the door is opened and the* WOMAN-SERVANT *enters. Finding nobody, she goes to the door on the left and, drawing the portière aside, knocks at that door gently. Having knocked, she drops the portière and, retreating a few steps, waits. Presently a hand is seen holding the portière and* IRIS'S *voice is heard.*]

IRIS [*very faintly*]. Yes?

SERVANT. The gentleman, ma'am.

[*The curtain is disturbed and the hand vanishes.*]

SERVANT [*approaching the curtain*]. I beg your pardon, ma'am —

IRIS. Ask him in.

[*The* SERVANT *goes out at the door at which she entered and returns almost immediately with* LAURENCE. LAURENCE *is in evening dress, but, in place of his town air, he has the bronzed face and slightly stiffened gait of a man accustomed to life in the open. He is wearing an overcoat and carries a felt hat. The* SERVANT *withdraws, leaving him gazing about him in some bewilderment. Slowly surveying the apartment, he puts his hat upon the little table behind the settee and is taking off his gloves when the portière again moves and* IRIS *appears. She remains in the doorway, her back towards him, clutching the curtain.*]

LAURENCE. Iris — !

[*She turns and faces him. She is clad entirely in black and wears no jewellery or embellishment of any description.*]

LAURENCE. Iris — Iris — !

[*He stretches out his arms. For a moment she wavers; then, with a swift movement, she sweeps across the room and falls upon his breast.*]

LAURENCE [*kissing her passionately*]. My dearest! my dearest! Iris, you are unaltered towards me? Iris! tell me you are quite unchanged.

IRIS [*murmuring his name as she clings to him*]. Laurie — Laurie — Laurie — !

LAURENCE. Kiss me — you don't kiss me —

[*With a cry, she takes his head between her hands and kisses him.*]

LAURENCE. Ah! Nothing has occurred to cause you to withdraw your love from me? I only want you to assure me of that.

IRIS [*her arms twined about his neck*]. I love you — I love you — I love you —

LAURENCE. Thank God! Your silence has driven me almost distracted. How could you be so cruel to me?

IRIS [*hiding her face against his shoulder*]. Cruel — cruel — yes, cruel — !

LAURENCE. What had I done to deserve it? I can't understand your motive —

IRIS. Hush! Wait — not yet — not yet. Kiss me again.

LAURENCE [*obeying her*]. Ah! ah! Ha, ha! Let me look at you. [*Holding her at arm's length.*] I am dying to look at you.

IRIS [*her eyes closed*]. Ah?

LAURENCE. You are more beautiful than ever.

IRIS [*swooningly*]. Oh — !

LAURENCE. Your face! it was always divine, but it has become still more spiritual — saint-like —

IRIS. Ah, ha?

LAURENCE [*passing his hand over her brow*]. I see — you have dressed your hair away from your forehead. That is it — you resemble the pictures of angels one was familiar with in childhood.

IRIS. A — a dark angel!

LAURENCE [*observing her dress for the first time*]. Why, yes; I didn't notice — Dearest, are you in mourning?

IRIS [*supporting herself upon his arm as she looks into his face*]. Mourning? This is not mourning: it is merely black. Nothing but the loss of you would make it mourning. [*With an attempt at*

brightness.] Ha! it was my fancy to receive you in this gown.

[*She turns from him and walks away, a little unsteadily, to the fireplace.*]

LAURENCE [*following her*]. How long may I remain with you? You are not going to send me away quickly?

IRIS. That depends upon yourself. I —I am free for the rest of the evening.

LAURENCE [*gaily*]. Depends upon me! [*Taking off his overcoat and throwing it over the back of the chair on the left of the fireplace.*] Well, a month would hardly suffice for me to say all I have to say to you. [*Returning to her and seizing her hands, which he presses again and again to his lips.*] Dearest, why — why did you cease writing to me? The torture of waiting for that infernal post — ! What could have been your reason?

IRIS [*tremblingly*]. What did you imagine it was — did you think I was ill?

LAURENCE. At first. I cabled home to Miss Sylvain, asking her if it was so.

IRIS. To Fanny Sylvain — !

LAURENCE. And received a laconic reply — "best of health." There my pride stepped in. Oh, the soil of a lonely ranch is favorable to the cultivation of a certain sort of sullen pride! Ah, but the agony of it! Iris, the theories I formed — all of them incorrect, doubtless — ! Now, at last, you can blow them away with a breath —

IRIS [*plucking at his sleeve*]. Laurence — have you seen Croker?

LAURENCE [*nodding*]. Last night.

IRIS. Yes; but to-day — ?

LAURENCE. No. He merely left a note at my hotel, giving me your message.

IRIS. Message — ?

LAURENCE. That I was to be here, at your lodgings, at nine.

IRIS. Nothing further?

LAURENCE [*shaking his head*]. Nothing further.

IRIS. And you've met no one else of our acquaintance?

LAURENCE. Nobody. [*Smiling.*] I've been frantically busy, trying to make myself presentable for this visit.

IRIS. Those theories of yours — what were they?

LAURENCE. One of them — [*looking about the room, a trace of apprehension in his voice*] don't tell me there was ever any ground for it —

IRIS. One of them — ?

LAURENCE. Was that your friends had come to your assistance, on condition that you broke faith with a struggling, hard-working fellow in British Columbia. [*Embracing her.*] Ah, forgive me!

[*The chair in which* IRIS *was seated, at breakfast, in the preceding act is now on the further side of the table with its back to the fireplace. She releases herself from* LAURENCE'S *embrace and sits in this chair, a desperate look in her eyes, steeling herself for her task.*]

LAURENCE [*leaning over her shoulder*]. Dearest, can you blame me? As I have said — the distorted ideas solitude gives rise to — ! [*Surveying the room once more.*] And even now I can't help feeling puzzled — [*Dropping his voice.*] What a charming place you have here!

IRIS [*faintly*]. Ah?

LAURENCE. Did your new lawyer manage to recover for you more than he expected? [*Struck by a new thought.*] Iris, surely you have not been angry with yourself for not fulfilling your promise to starve during my absence?

IRIS [*her elbows on the table, digging her fingers into her hair*]. You — you are nearing the truth!

LAURENCE [*fervently, his lips close to her ear*]. Oh, my love! my dear love! in whatever way these comforts have come to you, how could you doubt that I should be the first to rejoice that you have not, after all, been waiting for me in privation and anxiety?

IRIS [*in a hard, level voice — gently pushing him from her*]. Laurence — it is about — the way in which these comforts have come to me — that I want to talk to you.

[*She points to the settee and he seats himself there, a growing fear expressed in his face.*]

IRIS [*sitting upright, her body stiff, her eyes averted — with the little twist of her mouth*]. Laurie, this charming place is not mine.

LAURENCE. No?

IRIS. That is — it is not maintained by myself.

IRIS. By your friends — as I supposed?

IRIS. By a friend. [*A pause.*] A friend. [*A further pause.*] Yes, there *is* something — in your theory —

LAURENCE [*shortly*]. Oh? [*Slowly.*] You mean the condition does exist — the condition obliging you to be untrue to me? Iris — !

[*With an effort she turns her head and meets his gaze.*]

IRIS [*deliberately*]. It is a man-friend.

[*He allows the words to soak into his brain, then he rises and advances to her. She rises with him and they stand, facing each other, on opposite sides of the table.*]

LAURENCE. A man-friend?

IRIS. Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE [*under his breath*]. Maldonado!

IRIS. He is master here.

LAURENCE. Master — ! I — you must speak plainer.

IRIS. He — intended to take his revenge —

LAURENCE. Revenge!

IRIS. He never rested — never rested — until —

LAURENCE. Until — ?

IRIS. He was able — to cry quits with you.

[LAURENCE *recoils. Opening her eyes widely, she gives him a final look of guilt and abasement; then she collapses suddenly, dropping into her chair and laying her head and outstretched arms upon the table. He continues staring at her for a time; ultimately, covering his face with his hands, he sinks upon the settee.*]

IRIS [*lifting her head*]. No, he never left me alone. There's no palliation in that, perhaps, no excuse — but he never left me alone. [*Bursting into tears.*] Oh, I meant to be poor! I meant to be poor!

[*She rises and goes to the fireplace, upon which she leans, weeping.*]

IRIS. He — he placed some money at my disposal before he quitted Cadenabbia — opened an account for me, without my leave, at his bank in London. That was the beginning of it — the beginning of the path leading down to this awful abyss. I remained at Tremezzo barely a fortnight. I went there, as you know, because it was at Tremezzo we had passed such delicious hours; and I believed your spirit would linger about those quiet spots where we had been constantly together, you with your sketch-book on your knees, I close to you, both silent and happy. And so it was — only your presence became a reproach to me instead of a solace, a haunting reproach; for almost from the very moment of my receiving it, my hand accustomed itself to scrawling cheques, for one object and another, in the cheque-book he had considerately furnished me with. Therefore, finding my conscience wouldn't let me sit with your spirit in those dear retreats, I packed my trunks and slunk away to Varese.

[*He has not stirred. She looks at his stricken figure wofully and wanders toward the writing-table.*]

IRIS. Varese! At Varese I found *him*, waiting for me. Unfortunately I had written to him informing him of my arrangements; and there he was, in the courtyard of the little hotel, and he came forward to greet me. I confess I was glad to meet him; it was a familiar face — [*advancing to the table in the center*] Varese! How many times have I cursed Varese! He introduced me to some people who were wintering there — people who attached themselves to me, gave me treats, took me upon excursions. These I returned with interest. I felt myself compelled to have a small *salon* in which to entertain my new acquaintances — I who ought to have been weighing every sou; and soon, the afternoons growing chilly, I must needs send to Milan for a sable paletot to drive in. You see — step by step — he looking on — ! And throughout all this I was allowing you to believe I was fighting the battle of poverty with you!

[*He stirs slightly. She essays to put a hand upon his shoulder, but falters and draws back.*]

IRIS. After I had spent a couple of months at Varese, somebody proposed that we should move to Rome. And to Rome we went — the whole party. [*Pressing her hands to her brow.*] Rome! Rome! It was at Rome, shortly after we arrived there, that I discovered I had overdrawn my account at his bank. Strangely enough, he was advised of the circumstance by the same mail — of course, it was the crisis he had been waiting for — and he came to me promptly with his pocket-book in his hand. Then it was that my eyes were opened. Early next day I sold my sables for a third of their value and made off — got out of the city — fled — literally fled. And there commenced my long term of penury. Laurence, if you ever forgive me — if I am ever to be forgiven in this world or hereafter — it will be because of my sufferings during the months that followed my flight from Rome. Finding myself hopelessly embarrassed, I set myself to hunt-up my old friends in England. Friends! Ha! the scandal of our traveling abroad together — you and I — furnished them with a ready excuse to deliberately turn their backs upon a woman who had lost fortune and position. Only Fanny and Croker were left — Fanny living on relations at Stranraer, Croker upon his meagre salary as secretary of a club! Mainly to spare poor Croker the sight of me, I hid myself in cheap sea-side resorts out of their season, at the approach of their season crept inland to a stuffy town — all the while sinking further, further into debt and difficulty! At last every device for keeping my head above water was exhausted. I had even contrived to pledge the tiny income remaining from the wreck of my affairs, and I was without a shilling — absolutely without a shilling — my clothes nearly falling off me, my shoes in holes — ah! I was in London again by that time; it was as if I had come home for the finish. The horror of it! the back room in the narrow, grimy street; the regular, shameful visit to the pawnbroker's; the listless, mechanical stroll out in the dusk for air and exercise — ! I! I — your Iris — ! [*At the head of the settee.*] And one evening — he was continually tracing me and dogging my steps — one evening I met him and let him walk beside me; and — he handed me the key of this flat. Oh — ! [*Turning away and throwing herself upon the divan.*] They were waiting for me — these pretty rooms; they had been kept prepared for me for months. That was my deepest disgrace — that he seemed to be so certain I should find my way here.

[*She lies upon the divan, sobbing and moaning.* LAURENCE *removes his hands from his face and looks about him vacantly. Then he rises and walks, stiffly and heavily, to the fireplace.*]

LAURENCE [*staring into the fire — speaking in a toneless, expressionless voice*]. I — I am intensely sorry for you, Iris.

IRIS [*raising her head, faint and exhausted*]. Eh — ?

LAURENCE. I — I am sincerely sorry for you.

IRIS [*putting her disordered hair back from her brow*]. Sorry for me — ? I — I knew you would be. I — I was sure —

[*She leaves the divan and goes a little way towards him. Then, seeing that he does not turn to her, she checks herself.*]

IRIS [*by the settee, feebly*]. Ah — ah, yes — I ought to have spared you from learning it in this abrupt fashion. [*Sitting upon the settee, her eyes closed, her head resting against the back of the settee.*] How pitiless women are — especially to those they love, and have injured! Poor Laurie! But, dear, the first few weeks of my stay here were lived in a kind of stupor — inertia. I couldn't think — I couldn't reason. I didn't realize the dishonor — only that I was well-housed again. And afterwards — at one moment I would find myself hoping that the shocking news might reach you from other sources, at the next that my breaking-off with you might keep you from returning to England and that, by some miracle, you'd never hear the truth — at any rate, till

I had passed away. And so the months went on — and on —

LAURENCE [*partly turning to her*]. This man — he wished to marry you once —

IRIS. He wishes it still, to do him justice. Now that he has — oh! — revenged himself upon us, he finds out that he wishes to tie me to him.

LAURENCE [*facing her*]. He is in earnest? he means it?

IRIS. In earnest! indeed, yes. And I — I suppose I should have acceded to his wish ultimately, if this had not happened — if you had not come back. [*Sitting upright and putting her hands together prayerfully.*] Laurie — Laurie —

LAURENCE [*averting his eyes*]. Iris —

IRIS [*going down upon her knees beside the table and bowing her head upon her clasped hands*]. Laurie — Laurie — Laurie —

LAURENCE. I — I am very sorry.

[*He turns to the chair on his right and takes up his overcoat. Looking up, she sees his action.*]

IRIS [*under her breath*]. Ah! [*Struggling to her feet.*] What are you doing?

LAURENCE [*hanging his head*]. I — I am sorry.

[*She retreats, watching his movements. He goes to the table upon which he has deposited his hat.*]

IRIS. Oh — ! [*He picks up his hat.*] No — !

[*He advances, always avoiding her gaze, and stands before her looking upon the ground.*]

IRIS. You — you can't pardon me? Oh, try. [*She waits for a reply, but he is silent.*] I had my good resolutions, Laurie; it was through them that we separated, if you remember — that I refused to go out with you. The little good in me, then, has proved my downfall. That's hard.

LAURENCE. I — 'm sorry.

IRIS. You could trust me now, dear, if you would but take me back with you. Oh, it would save me from so much that is hateful. Try! [*A pause.*] No? You — you feel you can't?

LAURENCE [*inarticulately*]. I'm sorry.

IRIS [*supporting herself by leaning upon the chair by the writing-table*]. *Have* you prospered? *Would* the home have been ready for me?

LAURENCE. Yes.

IRIS [*dropping her head upon her breast*]. Oh! [*Rallying a little and returning to him.*] Well, I don't reproach you. If I were a man, I suppose I should do precisely as you are doing. [*Piteously.*] Only I thought, as my first wrong step was taken for love of you —

LAURENCE [*covering his eyes with his hand*]. Iris — Iris — !

IRIS. Hush! I ought not to have said that to you; that wasn't fair.

[*She cries for a moment, softly, then dries her eyes and offers him her hand. He takes it.*]

IRIS. By-and-by — in a little while — send me a photograph of that log-house of yours. Merely slip it into an envelope — will you? [*He inclines his head.*] Thanks. I should dearly like to have one — just to see —

[*She withdraws her hand and, after a brief struggle with himself, he goes to the door. Almost involuntarily, she totters after him for a few steps; but he leaves her without looking back. When he has gone, she drops upon the settee and sits there stunned and motionless. There is a pause; then the door on the right opens quietly and* MALDONADO *appears. He is still in his morning dress, but his necktie is disarranged and his eyes are bloodshot and his face livid. He comes to her and lays his hand upon her shoulder. With a cry of terror, she twists her body round and faces him.*]

MALDONADO. Your visitor has departed — eh?

[*She rises and backs away from him towards the left. He follows her.*]

MALDONADO. You rag of a woman! you double-faced trull! you liar!

IRIS. Hush! Maldo — !

MALDONADO. Ah — !

[*He seizes her by the arms and hurls her on to the settee. Then he stands over her, his eyes aflame.*]

MALDONADO. You — !

IRIS. Hush! Maldo! don't hurt me! Maldo!

[*Gripping her wrist, he pulls her up from the settee violently.*]

IRIS. Maldo! Maldo! don't hurt me! Maldo!

[*He throws her from him again and she stumbles towards the fireplace, where she falls into the chair by the table. Once more he goes after her, uttering ferocious sounds, his fingers extended like claws. In the end, he forces himself to quit her side and staggers to the settee, upon which, his rage partially spent, he drops panting. There is silence between them for a time, broken only by her sobs and his heavy breathing.*]

IRIS. Oh! oh! oh!

MALDONADO. Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! So — so — so you've lost your second sweetheart, have you? Or am I Number Two? Which of us do you rank first?

IRIS. You — you know? You have listened, then?

MALDONADO [*nodding scowlingly*]. He cleared out pretty sharply. Your influence is a diminishing quantity, my dear. You must be getting old.

IRIS. How did you — learn — ?

MALDONADO. The note you wrote to him this morning, and tore up. You shouldn't have thought better of committing yourself to paper and then have scattered the scraps of your love-letter about your writing-table. [*She glances at the waste-paper basket.*] That dog Harrington is running your errands, is he?

[*She rises feebly and goes to the mantelpiece, upon which she leans.*]

MALDONADO. Ha! an enjoyable day you've all given me! I've been in this accursed street for hours, waiting for Master Laurence to arrive or for you to come out.

IRIS. Well, you see he has left me — left me for good —

MALDONADO. Yes, the fellow has more sense than I, after all; a great deal more sense than I. [*Rising and crossing the room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.*] What an escape! what an escape!

IRIS. Escape — ?

MALDONADO. Escape. [*Wiping the sweat from his brow.*] Phew! you're the sort of woman that sends a hot-blooded man to the gallows, my dear.

IRIS. No, no, no, no —

MALDONADO. You're not too old for that, still. Yes, to-day reads me a lesson. [*Partly to himself.*] Tsch! what a lesson, Freddy! what a lesson!

[*Absorbed in thought, he moves towards the mantelpiece. She shrinks from him and comes to the settee.*]

MALDONADO. Oh, don't be frightened — my fit's over. [*Sitting, staring before him, his fingers drumming upon the table.*] Only I must be careful in the future — more careful in the future. The risk is too deadly.

IRIS [*seated upon the settee, eyeing him wonderingly*]. Risk — ?

MALDONADO [*again partly to himself*]. I have no ambition to figure in the dock some day. That's not my game. [*To her.*] I come of a race whose qualities are curiously blended, my dear — made up partly of passion, partly of prudence. For some years now, thanks to you, I've been letting the first run away with me. [*Drawing a deep breath.*] I can't afford that. Freddy Maldonado can't afford that. [*Bringing his fist down upon the table heavily.*] To-night ends it — ends it! [*Rising and pointing to the door which admits to the hall.*] You can go.

IRIS. Go — ?

MALDONADO. This place is mine —

IRIS. Maldo — !

MALDONADO. You'll take your departure.

IRIS. Maldo!

MALDONADO. You hear?

IRIS [*rising*]. When — when — ?

MALDONADO. Now. I desire to be left alone.

IRIS [*bewildered*]. To-night?

MALDONADO. At once. This is your punishment, my dear —

IRIS. Ah!

MALDONADO. To drift back to the con-

dition in which I found you a few months since. This is your reward.

IRIS. Maldo — !

MALDONADO [*ringing the bell*]. Go.

[*There is a pause, during which he continues ringing. Suddenly she stiffens her body and, like one walking in a dream, crosses the room and goes out at the door on the left. The* SERVANT *appears.*]

MALDONADO [*to the* SERVANT]. You'll all leave my service to-morrow, you women.

SERVANT. Sir — !

MALDONADO. Wages shall be paid you in lieu of notice, and a present given you.

SERVANT. Thank you, sir.

MALDONADO. Tell your fellow-servants.

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

MALDONADO [*listening*]. That'll do.

[*The* SERVANT *withdraws as* IRIS *returns wearing a hat and cape and carrying her gloves. Her head still erect, she moves toward the door leading to the hall.*]

MALDONADO [*playing with his beard*]. You — er —

[*Upon hearing his voice, she halts abruptly in the center of the room.*]

MALDONADO. You can send for your trinkets and clothes in the morning. After that, let me hear no more of you. [*She remains motionless, as if stricken.*] I've nothing further to say.

[*A slight shiver runs through her frame and she resumes her walk. At the door, she feels blindly for the handle; finding it, she opens the door narrowly and passes out. Directly the door closes behind her,* MALDONADO *utters a fierce cry and, with one movement of his arm, sweeps the china and bric-à-brac from the mantelpiece. The fragments are scattered about the room.*]

MALDONADO. Ah! ah! Ho, ho!

[*He overturns the table with a savage kick; then, raising a chair high in the air, he dashes it to the floor and breaks it into splinters. The curtain falls finally.*

THE END.

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The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (A. W. Pinero)
The Easiest Way (Eugene Walter)
Declassée (Zoë Akins)
The Fugitive (John Galsworthy)

QUESTIONS ON "IRIS"

1. Discuss Iris's character at the beginning of the play.
2. What was her first misstep?
3. Is Maldonado a plausible character?
4. How many times is the curtain lowered during the play? What is the effect of so many breaks in the action?
5. Select three effective situations or scenes that show Pinero's cleverness as a dramatic craftsman.
6. Comment on the ending.

ARNOLD BENNETT

Although Arnold Bennett is better known for his novels than for his plays, he has made some very delightful and distinctive, if not very significant, contributions to the modern drama in *Milestones, What the Public Wants,* and *The Great Adventure.* Mr. Bennett was born in 1867 in Staffordshire, the somber pottery making district of England and the scene of his best novels. Like many another writer he served his apprenticeship in journalism, becoming editor of *Woman* in 1893 after working for a few years as reporter on a provincial newspaper. Six years as a clerk in a lawyer's office in London also contributed to his education, the formal part of which did not carry him beyond the Newcastle Middle School. Since 1900 Mr. Bennett has devoted himself exclusively to writing and has been for a generation a prolific contributor to all forms of literature except poetry.

Perhaps Arnold Bennett has never felt the need of expressing himself in verse concerning life and a world which, to him, is itself mystery and poetry. To Mr. Bennett the commonplace is exciting. The bare fact of circumstance and character is itself fraught with such intrinsic piquancy and stimulation that no embellishment is necessary. He has lifted mere reporting to the level of the arts; for even more than Balzac he selects details that speak for themselves, and refrains from interpretation. His sedulous study of Flaubert, de Maupassant, and other French realists is reflected in his careful avoidance of extravagance and romance; yet he has an imaginative power that elevates his pages far above journalism and places *Old Wives' Tale* and *Riceyman Steps* on a level with the great Victorian novels.

Although as a dramatist Mr. Bennett has not equaled his performance as a novelist, he has given a dozen intelligent and vastly entertaining plays to the modern stage. He is best known for *Milestones,* which he collaborated with Edward Knoblock in writing; such comedies as *The Great Adventure* and *What the Public Wants* have been extremely successful in England. His plays are distinguished by the same negative qualities that characterize his novels: an absence of sentiment and romance, and in general of those euphuistic and exaggerative elements that are seldom missing in the older drama. The comedies also reveal Bennett's insatiable curiosity about life, but fail in comparison with the novels because the multitudinous details that are of high interest in themselves cannot be transferred to the stage with dramatic effectiveness. *The Great Adventure* is a dramatization of Mr. Bennett's own *Buried Alive,* the merriest of his novels. Like *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* it is a farce, although as in these other two plays interest in character is by no means negligible. Upon the first presentation of *The Great Adventure* in New York Mr. Clayton Hamilton pointed out its unconventionality of structure. / There is no conflict of wills, which Brunetière laid down as the first requisite of drama (the protagonist of Bennett's comedy has no will of his own); the play proceeds merrily without any fairly marked rise and fall of action, climax, and catastrophe, which Freytag declared every drama must possess. There is no particular crisis in the play, for as Mr. Hamilton points out, the hero refuses to accept any part of his great adventure as a crisis. In so far as our amusement arises from character and not from situation the play is not farce but true comedy; but the audacity of the initial misunderstanding and the amusing complications resulting from it are farce elements.

Here as in the novels Bennett's humor is tinged with good-natured satire often so unstressed that we are not sure that any satirical implication is present. The

easy contentment of the great artist in a middle-class household that offers him only material comfort is in itself a delightful chaffing of the intelligentsia. The Philistinism of the British public and its naïveté in estimating art and artists are gently ridiculed.

In *The Truth About An Author* Mr. Bennett writes frankly and engagingly about his craft. He confesses that he is a novelist who writes plays for financial reasons, and that it is far easier to write a play than a novel, and far more remunerative. In spite of these artistic heresies, Bennett's plays are distinguished by their delicious comedy, whimsical characters, convincing dialogue, and intelligent view of life.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE
(1913)

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

CHARACTERS

ILAM CARVE, *An Illustrious Painter* 4
ALBERT SHAWN, *Ilam's Valet*
DR. PASCOE
EDWARD HORNING, *Doctor's Assistant*
CYRUS CARVE, *Ilam's Cousin, a City Auctioneer*
FATHER LOOE, *A Catholic Priest*
PETER HORNING, *A Journalist*
EBAG, *A Picture Dealer*
JOHN SHAWN, *A Curate*
JAMES SHAWN, *His Brother, a Curate*
LORD LEONARD ALCAR
TEXEL, *An American Millionaire*
A WAITER
A PAGE
A SERVANT
JANET CANNOT, *a widow*
MRS. ALBERT SHAWN
HONORIA LOOE, *sister of Father Looe*

ACT I: Room in Ilam Carve's house, 126 Redcliffe Gardens

ACT II: Private room at the Grand Babylon Hotel

ACT III: Janet's sitting-room at Werter Road, Putney

ACT IV: Lord Leonard Alcar's study, Grosvenor Gardens

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THE GREAT ADVENTURE

ACT I

SCENE I.—*Front room on ground floor at 126 Redcliffe Gardens. An apartment furnished richly but in an old-fashioned way. Fine pictures. Large furniture. Sofa near center. General air of neglect and dustiness. Carpet half-laid. Trunks and bags lying about in corners, some opened. Men's wearing apparel exposed. Mantelpiece,* R., *in disorder. At back double doors (ajar) leading to another room. Door,* L., *leading to hall and front door.*

TIME.—*Evening in August.*

[ALBERT SHAWN *is reclining on the sofa, fully dressed, but obviously ill: an overcoat has been drawn over his legs. A conspicuous object is a magnificent light purple dressing-gown thrown across a chair.*]

[*Door bangs off. Enter* ILAM CARVE *in his shirt sleeves, hurriedly.* SHAWN *feebly tries to get up.*]

CARVE. Now, don't move. Remember you're a sick man, and forget you're a servant.

[SHAWN *shivers.* CARVE, *about to put on his dressing-gown, changes his mind, and wraps it round* SHAWN *as well as he can.* CARVE *then puts on an oldish coat.*]

SHAWN [*feebly*]. You've been very quick, sir.

CARVE. I found a red lamp only three doors off. He'll be along in half a minute.

SHAWN. Did you explain what it was, sir?

CARVE [*genially*]. How could I explain what it was, you fool, when I don't know? I simply asked to see the doctor, and I told him there was a fellow-creature suffering at No. 126, and would he come at once. "126?" he said, "126 has been shut up for years."

SHAWN [*trying to smile*]. What did you say, sir?

CARVE. I said [*articulating with clearness*] a hundred and twenty-six — and ran off. Then he yelled out after me that he'd come instantly. . . . I say, Shawn, we're discovered. I could tell that from his sudden change of tone. I bet the entire street knows that the celebrated Me has arrived at last. I feel like a criminal already, dashed if I don't! I wish we'd gone to a hotel now. [*Walks about.*] I say, did you make up the bed?

SHAWN. I was just doing it, sir.

CARVE. But what about sheets and so on?

SHAWN. I bought some this morning, ready hemmed, sir — with those and the travelling rug —

CARVE. Well, don't you think you could work your passage out to the bed? With my help?

SHAWN. Me in your bed, sir!

CARVE [*genially bullying*]. Keep on in that tone — and I'll give you the sack on the spot. Now then. Try — before the doctor comes. [*Bell rings.*]

SHAWN. The bell, sir — excuse me.

CARVE. Confound — [*Exit* CARVE.]

[SHAWN *coughs and puts a handkerchief to his mouth.* CARVE *returns immediately with* DR. PASCOE.]

PASCOE [*glancing round quickly*]. This the patient? [*Goes to* SHAWN, *and looks at him. Then, taking a 'clinical thermometer from his pocket and wiping it; with marked respect.*] Allow me to put this under your tongue for half

a minute. [*Having done so, he takes* SHAWN'S *wrist and, looking at his watch, counts the patient's pulse. Then turning to* CARVE, *in a low curt voice.*] When did this begin?

CARVE. Just now. That is, he only began to complain about six o'clock. We arrived in London this morning from Madrid.

PASCOE [*reading thermometer*]. Temperature 104½. Pulse is 140—and weak. I must have some boiling water.

CARVE [*at a loss*]. What for?

PASCOE. What for? For a poultice.

CARVE [*helplessly*]. But there isn't any . . . we've nothing except this spirit-lamp.

[*Pointing to lamp on table.*]

PASCOE. No women in the house?

CARVE [*with humor that the doctor declines to see*]. Not one.

PASCOE [*controlling his exasperation*]. Never mind. I'll run round to the surgery and get my hypodermic. [*To* SHAWN, *reassuringly and deferentially.*] I shall be back at once, Mr. Carve. [*To* CARVE, *near door.*] Keep your master well covered up—I suppose you can do that? [*Exit.*]

CARVE. Shawn, my poor fellow, he takes you for the illustrious Ilam Carve. This is what comes of me rushing out in shirt sleeves. [*Gesture of despair.*] I can't explain it to him.

SHAWN. But—

CARVE. It's all right. You'll be infinitely better looked after, you know, and I shall be saved from their infernal curiosity.

SHAWN. It's only this, sir. I was half-expecting a young lady to-night, sir [*very feebly*]. At least, I believe she's young.

CARVE. Shawn, I've always suspected you were a bad lot. Now I know. I also know why you were so devilish anxious to put me to bed early. What am I to say to this young lady on your behalf?

[SHAWN *worse, too ill to answer. Pause. Re-enter* DR. PASCOE, *very rapidly, with a large tumbler half-full of hot liquid.*]

PASCOE. You may say I've been quick. [*As he bends down to* SHAWN, *addressing* CARVE.] Get me a wine glass of clean cold water. [*To* SHAWN.] Now, please. I want you to drink a little brandy and water. [SHAWN *makes no response.*] By Jove!

[*The doctor pours some of the brandy and water down* SHAWN'S *throat.*]

CARVE [*who has been wandering about vaguely*]. I don't think we've got a wine glass. There's a cup, but I suppose that isn't medical enough.

PASCOE [*taking a syringe from his pocket and unscrewing it*]. Pour some water in it. [CARVE *obeys.*] Now, hold it.

CARVE [*indicating syringe*]. What is this device?

PASCOE. This device? I'm going to get some strychnine into him by injection. Steady with that cup, now!

[PASCOE *drops a tablet into the syringe and screws it up again, draws a little water up into the syringe and shakes the syringe. Then he goes to* SHAWN *to make the injection, on the top side of the patient's forearm.* CARVE *still holds the cup out mechanically.*]

PASCOE. I've done with that cup.

CARVE [*putting the cup down*]. Might I ask what's the matter with him?

PASCOE. Pneumonia is the matter.

[*Noise of some one in the hall.*]

CARVE [*startled*]. Surely that's some one in the hall.

PASCOE. Keep perfectly calm, my man. It's my assistant. I left the door open on purpose for him. He's got the poultice and things. [*In a loud voice as he finishes the injection.*] Come along, come along there. This way.

[*Enter* EDWARD HORNING *with poultice, lint, bandages, etc.*]

PASCOE. Found the antiphlogistine?

EDWARD. Yes.

[*He looks at patient, and exchanges a glance with* PASCOE.]

PASCOE. Where's the bedroom?

CARVE. There's one there.

[*Pointing to double doors.*]

PASCOE [*to* HORNING]. We'll get him

into bed now. [*To* CARVE.] Bed ready?

CARVE. Yes. I—I think he was just making it up.

PASCOE [*startled*]. Does he make up his own bed?

CARVE [*perceiving the mistake, but resuming his calm*]. Always.

PASCOE [*controlling his astonishment; looking through double doors and opening them wider. To* HORNING]. Yes, this will do. Put those things down here a minute while we lift him.

[PASCOE *and* HORNING *then carry the inanimate form of* SHAWN *into the room behind, while* CARVE *hovers about uselessly.*]

CARVE. Can I do anything?

PASCOE [*indicating a chair furthest away from the double doors.*] You see that chair?

CARVE. I see it.

PASCOE. Go and sit on it.

[*Exeunt* PASCOE *and* HORNING, *back, closing double doors.*]

[*After walking about,* CARVE *sits down on another chair. A bell rings twice. He pays no attention. Then enter* JANET CANNOT, L. CARVE *jumps up, but is inarticulate, though very favorably interested.*]

JANET [*smiling sympathetically*]. I rang twice.

CARVE. The bell must be out of order.

JANET. I couldn't be sure, but I don't think it's the bell that's out of order.

CARVE. Oh! You think I'm out of order.

JANET. No. I was thinking that you'd only just come into the house—all you famous folk—and you hadn't quite got it straight yet—as it were.

[*Looking vaguely at room.*]

CARVE. All we famous folk?

JANET. Well—I don't know myself about that sort of thing.

CARVE. What sort of thing?

JANET. Picture-painting, isn't it? I mean real pictures done by hand, coloured—

CARVE. Ah—yes.

JANET [*after a slight pause*]. It struck me all of a sudden, while I was waiting at the door, that it might have been left open on purpose.

CARVE. The front door? On purpose? What for?

JANET. Oh—for some one particular to walk in without any fuss. So in I stepped.

CARVE. You're the young lady that Mr. Shawn's expecting—

[*Going towards passage.*]

JANET [*stopping him*]. It's shut now. You don't want *everybody* walking in, do you?

CARVE [*looking at* JANET *with pleasure*]. So you're the young lady—Mrs.—Miss—

JANET [*ignoring his question*]. Was it a message you had for me?

CARVE. No, no. Not a message. . . . But—the fact is, we're rather upset here for the moment.

JANET. Yes. Illness.

CARVE. Now, if it isn't an indiscreet question, how *did* you know that there was illness?

JANET. I was standing looking at this house and wondering whether I shouldn't do better to go right back home there and then. But "No," I said, "I've begun, and I'll go through with it."—Well, I was standing there when what should I see but a parlor maid pop up from the area steps next door, and she says to me over the railings, "The doctor's just been." Just like that, excited. So I said, "Thank you, miss." I hope it's nothing serious?

CARVE. Pneumonia.

JANET. Pneumonia. What a mercy!

CARVE. Mercy?

JANET. If you look at it sensibly it's about the best illness anybody could have in hot weather like this. You've got to keep them warm. The weather does it for you. If it was typhoid now, and you'd got to keep them cool—that *would* be awkward. Not but it passes me how anybody can catch pneumonia in August.

CARVE. Coming over from the Continent.

JANET. Oh! the Continent. It's not Mr. Shawn that's ill?

CARVE [*hesitating*]. Mr. Shawn? Oh no, no! It's Ilam Carve.

JANET [*half whispering. Awed*]. Oh, *him!* Poor thing. And nobody but men in the house.

CARVE. And who told you *that?*

JANET. Well! [*waves her hand to indicate the state of the room, smiling indulgently*] I always feel sorry for gentlemen when they have to manage for themselves, even if they're well and hearty. But when it comes to illness — I can't bear to think about it. Still, everybody has their own notions of comfort. And I've no doubt he'll very soon be better.

CARVE. You think he will?

JANET [*blandly cheerful*]. As a general rule, you may say that people do get better. That's my experience. Of course sometimes they take a longish time. And now and then one dies — else what use would cemeteries be? But as a general rule they're soon over it. Now am I going to see Mr. Shawn, or shall I —

CARVE. Well, if you *could* call again —

JANET. You say you hadn't a message?

CARVE. Not precisely a message. But if you could call again —

JANET. When?

CARVE [*rather eagerly*]. Any time. Any time. Soon.

JANET. Night after to-morrow?

CARVE. Why not morning?

JANET. Perhaps morning is safer. Thank you. Very well, then. Day after to-morrow. . . . I suppose Mr. Shawn has a rare fine situation here?

CARVE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Nothing to complain of, if you ask me.

[JANET *offers her hand quite simply. The double doors open.* CARVE *looks alarmed.*]

JANET. Thank you very much. I think I can open the front door myself.

CARVE. I say — you won't forget?

JANET. Well, what do *you* think?

[*Exit,* L.]

[*Enter* DR. PASCOE *through double doors.*]

PASCOE [*at double doors, to* HORNING *invisible behind*]. Then there's no reason why the nurse at Edith Grove shouldn't come along here.

HORNING [*off*]. Yes. She'll be free in an hour.

PASCOE. All right. I'll look in there.

HORNING [*nervous*]. What am I to do if his respiration —

PASCOE [*interrupting*]. Don't worry. I'm not gone yet. I must just clean up my hypodermic. Shut those doors.

[HORNING *obeys.*]

CARVE. What's this about a nurse?

PASCOE [*busy with syringe, water, and syringe-case*]. I'm sending one in. [*Ironically.*] Do you see any objection?

CARVE. On the contrary, I should like him to be treated with every care. He's invaluable to me.

PASCOE [*staggered*]. Invaluable to *you!* Of course in my line of business I get used to meeting odd people —

CARVE [*recovering from his mistake*]. But you think I carry oddness rather far?

PASCOE. The idea did pass through my mind.

CARVE. Nervousness — nothing but nervousness. I'm very nervous. And then — you know the saying — like master, like man.

PASCOE [*indicating back room with a gesture; in a slightly more confidential tone as* CARVE'S *personal attractiveness gains on him*]. Mr. Carve odd?

CARVE. Oh, very. Always was. Ever since I've known him. You remember his first picture at the Academy?

PASCOE. No, not exactly.

CARVE. Either you remember it exactly or you don't remember it at all. Life-size picture of a policeman blowing his whistle.

PASCOE. Yes; it must have been odd, that must.

CARVE. Not a bit. The oddness of the fellow —

PASCOE. What 'fellow' — your governor?

CARVE [*nods*]. His oddness came out in this way — although the thing had really a great success, from that day to this he's never painted, another life-size

picture of a policeman blowing his whistle.

PASCOE. I don't see anything very odd there —

CARVE. Don't you? Well, perhaps you don't go in for art much. If you did, you'd know that the usual and correct thing for a painter who has made a great success with a life-size picture of a policeman blowing his whistle, is to keep on doing life-size pictures of a policeman blowing his whistle for ever and ever, so that the public can always count on getting from him a life-size picture of a policeman blowing his whistle.

PASCOE. I observe you are one of those comic valets. Nervousness again, no doubt.

CARVE [*smiling and continuing*]. Seeing the way he invariably flouted the public, it's always been a mystery to me how he managed to make a name, to say nothing of money.

PASCOE. Money! He must make pots. You say I don't go in for art much, but I always read the big sales at Christie's. Why, wasn't it that policeman picture that Lord Leonard Alcar bought for 2000 guineas last year?

CARVE. No, not Alcar. I think the bobby was last bought by Texel.

PASCOE. Texel? Who's Texel?

CARVE. Collector — United States — one of their kings, I'm told.

PASCOE. Oh, him! Controls all the ink in the United States.

CARVE. Really! That's what I should call influence. No. It was the "Pelicans feeding their Young" that Alcar bought. Four thousand. You're getting mixed up.

PASCOE. Perhaps I am. I know I'm constantly seeing Mr. Carve's name in connection with Lord Leonard Alcar's. It's a nice question which is the best known of the two.

CARVE. Then the — governor really is famous in England? You see we never come to England.

PASCOE. Famous — I should think he was. Aren't they always saying he's the finest colorist since Titian? And look at his prices!

CARVE. Yes. I've looked at his prices. Titian's prices are higher, but Titian isn't what you'd call famous with the general public, is he? What I want to know is — is the governor famous among the general public?

PASCOE. Yes.

CARVE. About how famous should you say he is?

PASCOE [*hesitating*]. Well — [*abruptly*] that's a silly question.

CARVE. No, it isn't. Is he as famous as — er — Harry Lauder?

PASCOE [*shakes his head*]. You mustn't go to extremes.

CARVE. Is he as famous as Harry Vardon?

PASCOE. Never heard of him.

CARVE. I only see these names in the papers. Is he as famous as Bernard Shaw?

PASCOE. Yes, I should say he was.

CARVE. Oh, well that's not so bad. Better than I thought! It's so difficult to judge where one is — er — personally concerned. Especially if you're never on the spot.

PASCOE. So it's true Mr. Carve never comes to England?

CARVE. Why should he come to England? He isn't a portrait painter. It's true he owns this house, but surely that isn't sufficient excuse for living in a place like England?

PASCOE. Of course, if you look at it like that, there's no particular attractiveness in England that I've ever seen. But that answer wouldn't satisfy Redcliffe Gardens. Redcliffe Gardens is persuaded that there must be a special reason.

CARVE. Well, there is.

PASCOE [*interested, in spite of himself*]. Indeed!

CARVE [*confidentially*]. Have a cigarette? [*Offering case.*]

PASCOE [*staggered anew, but accepting*]. That's a swagger case.

CARVE. Oh! [*Calmly.*] He gave it me.

PASCOE. Really?

CARVE. Well, you see we're more like brothers — been together so long. He gives me his best suits too. Look at this waistcoat.

[*Motions the hypnotised* PASCOE *to take a chair. They light their cigarettes.*]

[*Enter* HORNING.]

PASCOE [*somewhat impatient*]. He's not worse already?

HORNING. Where's that brandy and water?

PASCOE. Be careful. He's had about enough of that.

HORNING. Seeing I've had no dinner yet — I thought it might suit me.

[*Exit with tumbler.*]

PASCOE [*to* CARVE *with renewed eagerness*]. So there is a special reason why you keep out of England.

CARVE. Yes — shyness.

PASCOE. How — shyness?

CARVE. Just simple shyness. Shyness is a disease with the governor, a perfect disease.

PASCOE. But everyone's shy. The more experience I get the more convinced I am that we're all shy. Why, you were shy when you came to fetch me!

CARVE. Did you notice it?

PASCOE. Of course. And I was shy when I came in here. I was thinking to myself, "Now I'm going to see the great Ilam Carve actually in the flesh," and I was shy. You'd think my profession would have cured me of being shy, but not a bit. Nervous disease, of course! Ought to be treated as such. Almost universal. Besides, even if he is shy, your governor — even if he's a hundredfold shy, that's no reason for keeping out of England. Shyness is not one of those diseases you can cure by change of climate.

CARVE. Pardon me. My esteemed employer's shyness is a special shyness. He's only shy when he has to play the celebrity. So long as people take him for no one in particular he's quite all right. For instance, he's never shy with me. But instantly people approach him as the celebrity, instantly he sees in the eye of the beholder any consciousness of being in the presence of a toff — then he gets desperately shy, and his one desire is to be alone at sea or to be buried somewhere deep in the bosom of the earth. [PASCOE *laughs.*] What are you laughing at? [CARVE *also laughs.*]

PASCOE. Go on, go on. I'm enjoying it.

CARVE. No, but seriously! It's true what I tell you. It amounts almost to a tragedy in the brilliant career of my esteemed. You see now that England would be impossible for him as a residence. You see, don't you?

PASCOE. Quite.

CARVE. Why, even on the Continent, in the big towns and the big hotels, we often travel incognito for safety. It's only in the country districts that he goes about under his own name.

PASCOE. So that he's really got no friends?

CARVE. None, except a few Italian and Spanish peasants — and me.

PASCOE. Well, well! It's an absolute mania then, this shyness.

CARVE [*slightly hurt*]. Oh, not so bad as that! And then it's only fair to say he has his moments of great daring — you may say rashness.

PASCOE. All timid people are like that.

CARVE. Are they? [*Musing.*] We're here now owing to one of his moments of rashness.

PASCOE. Indeed!

CARVE. Yes. We met an English lady in a village in Andalusia, and — well, of course, I can't tell you everything — but she flirted with him and he flirted with her.

PASCOE. Under his own name?

CARVE. Yes. And then he proposed to her. I knew all along it was a blunder.

PASCOE [*ironic*]. Did you?

CARVE. Yes. She belonged to the aristocracy, and she was one of those amateur painters that wander about the Continent by themselves — you know.

PASCOE. And did she accept?

CARVE. Oh yes. They got as far as Madrid together, and then all of a sudden my esteemed saw that he had made a mistake.

PASCOE. And what then?

CARVE. We fled the country. We hooked it. The idea of coming to London struck him — just the caprice of a

man who's lost his head — and here we are.

PASCOE [*after a pause*]. He doesn't seem to me from the look of him to be a man who'd — shall we say? — strictly avoided women.

CARVE [*startled with a gesture towards back*]. Him? [PASCOE *nods.*] Really! Confound him! Now I've always suspected that; though he manages to keep his goings-on devilish quiet.

PASCOE [*rising*]. It occurs to me, my friend, that I'm listening to too much. But you're so persuasive.

CARVE. It's such a pleasure to talk freely — for once in a way.

PASCOE. Freely — is the word.

CARVE. Oh! He won't mind!

PASCOE [*in a peculiar tone*]. It's quite possible!

[*Enter* HORNING.]

HORNING [*to* CARVE]. I say, it's just occurred to me, Mr. Carve hasn't been digging or gardening or anything, I suppose, and then taken cold after?

CARVE. Digging? Oh no. He must have got a bad chill on the steamer. Why?

HORNING. Nothing. Only his hands and finger-nails are so rough.

CARVE [*after thinking*]. Oh, I see! All artists are like that. Messing about with paints and acids and things. Look at my hands.

PASCOE. But are you an artist too?

CARVE [*recovering himself, calmly*]. No, no.

PASCOE [*to* HORNING]. How's he going on?

HORNING [*shrugs his shoulders*]. I'm sure the base of both lungs is practically solid.

PASCOE. Well, we can't do more than we have done, my boy.

HORNING. He'll never pull through.

PASCOE [*calmly*]. I should certainly be surprised if he did.

CARVE [*astounded*]. But — but —

PASCOE. But what?

CARVE. You don't mean to say — Why, he's a strong healthy man!

PASCOE. Precisely. Not very unusual for your strong healthy man to die of pneumonia in twenty-four hours. You ought to know, at your age, that it's a highly dangerous thing to be strong and healthy. [*Turning away.*] I'll have another look at him before I go.

CARVE [*extremely perturbed*]. But this is ridiculous. I simply don't know what I shall do without that man.

[*The stage is darkened for a few moments to indicate passage of time.*]

SCENE 2

TIME. — *The next morning but one. Slightly less disorder in the room.*

[CARVE *and* PASCOE *are together, the latter ready to leave.*]

CARVE. Will there have to be an inquest?

PASCOE. Inquest? Of course not.

CARVE. It's some relief to know that. I couldn't have faced a coroner.

PASCOE [*staring at him*]. Perfectly ordinary case.

CARVE. That's what you call perfectly ordinary, is it? A man is quite well on Tuesday afternoon, and dead at 4 a.m. on Thursday morning. [*Looking at his watch.*] My watch has stopped.

PASCOE [*with fierce sarcasm*]. One of those cheap German watches, I suppose, that stop when you don't wind them up! It's a singular thing that when people stay up all night they take it for granted their watches are just as excited as they are. Look here, you'll be collapsing soon. When did you have anything to eat last?

CARVE. Almost half an hour ago. Two sausages that were sent in yesterday for the nurse.

PASCOE. She's gone?

CARVE. Oh yes.

PASCOE. Well, take my advice. Try to get some sleep now. You've had no reply from the relatives — the auctioneer cousin — what's his Christian name — Cyrus?

CARVE. No, I — I didn't telegraph — I forgot —

PASCOE. Well, upon my soul! I spe-

cially reminded you yesterday afternoon.

CARVE. I didn't know the address.

PASCOE. Ever heard of the London Directory? You'd better run out and wire instantly. You don't seem to realize that the death of a man like Ilam Carve will make something of a stir in the world. And you may depend on it that whether they'd quarrelled or not, Cyrus Carve will want to know why he wasn't informed of the illness at once. You've let yourself in for a fine row, and well you deserve it.

CARVE [*after a few paces*]. See here, doctor. I'm afraid there's been some mistake. [*Facing him nervously.*]

PASCOE. What?

CARVE. I—I—

[*Bell rings.*]

PASCOE [*firmly*]. Listen to me, my man. There's been no sort of mistake. Everything has been done that could be done. Don't you get ideas into your head. Lie down and rest. You're done up, and if you aren't careful you'll be ill. I'll communicate with Cyrus Carve. I can telephone, and while I'm about it I'll ring up the registrar too—he'll probably send a clerk round.

CARVE. Registrar?

PASCOE. Registrar of deaths. There'll be all kinds of things to attend to.

[*Moving to go out.*]

[*Bell rings again.*]

CARVE [*as if dazed*]. Is that the front door bell?

PASCOE [*drily*]. Quite possibly! I'll open it. [*Exit.*]

[CARVE *alone, makes a gesture of despair. Re-enter* PASCOE *with* CYRUS CARVE.]

PASCOE [*as they enter*]. Yes, very sudden, very sudden. There were three of us—a nurse, my assistant, and myself. This is Mr. Shawn, the deceased's valet.

CYRUS. Morning. [*Looks round at disorder of room contemptuously*]. Pigstye! . . . My name is Cyrus Carve. I'm your late master's cousin and his only relative. You've possibly never heard of me.

CARVE [*curtly*]. Oh yes, I have! You got up a great quarrel when you were aged twelve, you and he.

CYRUS. Your manner isn't very respectful, my friend. However you may have treated my cousin, be good enough to remember you're not *my* valet.

CARVE. How did you get to know about it?

CYRUS. I suppose he forbade you to send for me, eh? [*Pause.*] Eh?

CARVE [*jumping at this suggestion*]. Yes.

PASCOE. So that was it.

CYRUS [*ignoring* PASCOE]. Ha! Well, since you're so curious, I saw it a quarter of an hour ago in a special edition of a halfpenny rag; I was on my way to the office. [*Showing paper.*] Here you are! *The Evening Courier.* Quite a full account of the illness. You couldn't send for me, but you could chatter to some journalist.

CARVE. I've never spoken to a journalist in my life.

CYRUS. Then how—?

PASCOE. It's probably my assistant His brother is something rather important on the *Courier,* and he may have telephoned to him. It's a big item of news, you know, Mr. Carve.

CYRUS [*drily*]. I imagine so. Where is the body?

PASCOE. Upstairs.

[*Moving towards door.*]

CYRUS. Thanks. I will go alone.

PASCOE. Large room at back—first floor. [*Exit* CYRUS, L.] I think I'd prefer to leave you to yourselves now. Of course, Mr. Carve will do all that's necessary. You might give him my card, and tell him I'm at his service as regards signing the death certificate and so on. [*Handing card.*]

CARVE [*taking card perfunctorily*]. Very well. Then you're going?

PASCOE. Yes. [*Moves away and then suddenly puts out his hand, which* CARVE *takes.*] Want a word of advice?

CARVE. I—I ought—

PASCOE. If I were you I should try to get something better than valeting. It's not your line. You may have suited

Ilam Carve, but you'd never suit an ordinary employer. You aren't a fool — not by any means.

[Carve *shrugs his shoulders.*]

[*Exit* Pascoe, L. *Door shuts off.*]

[*Re-enter* Cyrus *immediately after the door shuts.*]

Carve [*to himself*]. Now for it! [*To* Cyrus.] Well?

Cyrus. Well what?

Carve. Recognize your cousin?

Cyrus. Of course a man of forty-five isn't like a boy of twelve, but I think I may say I should have recognized him anywhere.

Carve [*taken aback*]. Should you indeed. [*A pause.*] And so you're Cyrus, the little boy that kicked and tried to bite in that historic affray of thirty years ago.

Cyrus. Look here, I fancy you and I had better come to an understanding at once. What salary did my cousin pay you for your remarkable services?

Carve. What salary?

Cyrus. What salary?

Carve. Eighty pounds a year.

Cyrus. When were you last paid?

Carve. I — I —

Cyrus. When were you last paid?

Carve. The day before yesterday.

Cyrus [*taking a note and gold from his pocketbook and pocket*]. Here's seven pounds — a month's wages in lieu of notice. It's rather more than a month's wages, but I can't do sums in my head just now.

[*Holding out money.*]

Carve. But listen —

Cyrus [*commandingly*]. Take it.

[Carve *obeys.*]

Pack up and be out of this house within an hour.

Carve. I —

Cyrus. I shall not argue. . . . Did your master keep his private papers and so on in England or somewhere on the Continent — what bank?

Carve. What bank? He didn't keep them in any bank.

Cyrus. Where did he keep them then?

Carve. He kept them himself.

Cyrus. What — travelling?

Carve. Yes. Why not?

Cyrus [*with a "tut-tut" noise to indicate the business man's mild scorn of the artist's methods*]. Whose is this luggage?

Carve. Mine.

Cyrus. All of it?

Carve. That is —

Cyrus. Come now, is it his or is it yours? Now be careful.

Carve. His. [*Angrily, as* Cyrus *roughly handles a box.*] Now then, mind what you're about! Those are etching things.

Cyrus. I shall mind what I'm about. And what's this?

Carve. That's a typewriter.

Cyrus. I always thought artists couldn't stand typewriting machines.

Carve. That was — his servant's.

Cyrus. Yours, you mean?

Carve. Yes, I mean mine.

Cyrus. Then why don't you say so? What do you want a typewriter for?

Carve [*savagely*]. What the devil has that got to do with you?

Cyrus [*looking up calmly from the examination of a dispatch box*]. If you can't keep a civil tongue in your head I'll pitch you down the front-door steps and your things after you.

Carve. I've got something to tell you —

Cyrus. Silence, and answer my questions! Are his papers in this dispatch box?

Carve. Yes.

Cyrus. Where are his keys?

Carve [*slowly drawing bunch of keys from his pocket*]. Here.

Cyrus [*taking them*]. So you keep his keys?

Carve. Yes.

Cyrus [*opening dispatch box*]. Wear his clothes too, I should say!

[Carve *sits down negligently and smiles.*]

Cyrus [*as he is examining papers in box*]. What are you laughing at?

Carve. I'm not laughing. I'm smiling. [*Rising and looking curiously at box.*] There's nothing there except lists of securities and pictures and a few oddments — passports and so on.

Cyrus. There appears to be some

money. I'm glad you've left that. Quite a lot, in fact. [*Showing notes.*]

CARVE. Here, steady! There's twelve thousand francs there besides some English notes. That's mine.

CYRUS. Yours, eh? He was taking care of it for you, no doubt?

CARVE [*hesitating*]. Yes.

CYRUS. When you can furnish me with his receipt for the deposit, my man, it shall be handed to you. Till then it forms part of the estate. [*Looking at a packet of letters.*] "Alice Rowfant."

CARVE. And those letters are mine too.

CYRUS [*reading*]. "My dearest boy"—Were you Lady Alice Rowfant's dearest boy? Anyhow, we'll burn them.

CARVE. So long as you burn them I don't mind.

CYRUS. Indeed!

[*Continues to examine papers, cheque foils, etc. Then opens a document.*]

CARVE. Oh! Is *that* still there? I thought it was destroyed.

CYRUS. Do you know what it is?

CARVE. Yes. It's a will that was made in Venice I don't know how long ago—just after your aunt died and you had that appalling and final shindy by correspondence about the lease of this house. Everything is left for the establishment of an International Gallery of Painting and Sculpture in London, and you're the sole executor, and you get a legacy of five pounds for your trouble.

CYRUS. Yes . . . So I see. No doubt my cousin imagined it would annoy me.

CARVE. He did.

CYRUS. He told you so?

CARVE. He said it would be one in the eye for you—and he wondered whether you'd decline the executorship.

CYRUS. Well, my man, I may tell you at once that I shall not renounce probate. I never expected a penny from my cousin. I always assumed he'd do something silly with his money, and I'm relieved to find it's no worse. In fact, the idea of a great public institution in London being associated with my family is rather pleasant.

CARVE. But he meant to destroy that will long since.

CYRUS [*as he cons the will*]. How do you know? Has he made a later will?

CARVE. No.

CYRUS. Well, then! Besides, I fail to see why you should be so anxious to have it destroyed. You come into eighty pounds a year under it.

CARVE. I was forgetting that.

CYRUS [*reading*]. "I bequeath to my servant, Albert Shawn, who I am convinced is a thorough rascal, but who is an unrivalled valet, courier, and factotum, the sum of eighty pounds a year for life, payable quarterly in advance, provided he is in my service at the time of my death."

[CARVE *laughs shortly.*] You don't want to lose that, do you? Of course, if the term "thorough rascal" is offensive to you, you can always decline the money. [*Folds up will and puts it in his pocket*—CARVE *walks about.*] Now where's the doctor?

CARVE. He's left his card. There it is.

CYRUS. He might have waited.

CARVE. Yes. But he didn't. His house is only three doors off.

CYRUS [*looking at his watch*]. I'll go in and see him about the certificate. Now you haven't begun to put your things together, and you've only got a bit over half an hour. In less than that time I shall be back. I shall want to look through your luggage before you leave.

CARVE [*lightly*]. Shall you?

CYRUS. By the way, you have a latchkey? [CARVE *nods.*] Give it me, please.

[CARVE *surrenders latchkey.*]

[CYRUS *turns to go—As he is disappearing through the door,* L., CARVE *starts forward.*]

CARVE. I say.

CYRUS. What now?

CARVE [*subsiding weakly*]. Nothing.

[*Exit* CYRUS. *Sound of front door opening and of voices in hall.*]

[*Then re-enter* CYRUS *with* JANET CANNOT.]

CYRUS. *This* is Mr. Albert Shawn. Shawn, a friend of yours.

[*Exit.* L.]

CARVE [*pleased*]. Oh! You!

JANET. Good-morning. D'you know, I had a suspicion the other night that you must be Mr. Shawn?

CARVE. Had you? Well, will you sit down — er — I say [*with a humorous mysterious air*]. What do *you* think of that chap?

[*Pointing in direction of hall.*]

JANET. Who is it?

CARVE. It's Mr. Cyrus Carve. The great West End auctioneer.

[*Sound of front-door shutting rather too vigorously.*]

JANET. Well, I see no reason why he should look at me as if I'd insulted him.

CARVE. Did he?

JANET. "Good-morning," I said to him. "Excuse me, but are you Mr. Albert Shawn?" Because I wasn't sure, you know. And he *looked*.

CARVE [*after laughing*]. The man is an ass.

JANET. Is he?

CARVE. Not content with being an ass merely, he is a pompous and a stupid ass. [*Laughs again to himself.*] Now there is something very important that he ought to know, and he wouldn't let me tell him.

JANET. Really?

CARVE. Yes, very important. But no. He wouldn't let me tell him. And perhaps if I'd told him he wouldn't have believed me.

JANET. What did he do to stop you from telling him?

CARVE [*at a loss, vaguely*]. I don't know — Wouldn't let me.

JANET. If you ask me, I should say the truth is, you didn't want to tell him.

CARVE [*impressed*]. Now I wonder if you're right.

JANET. Well, I don't quite see how anybody can *stop* anybody from talking. But even if he did, he can't stop you from writing to him.

CARVE. No, I'm hanged if I write to him!

JANET. Oh, well, that's a proof you *didn't* want to tell him.

CARVE. Perhaps it is. [*After a burst of quiet laughter.*] Pardon me. [*Reflective.*] I was only thinking what a terrific lark it will be.

JANET. If he never does get to know?

CARVE. If he never does get to know If nobody ever gets to know. [*Resolved.*] No. I'll keep my mouth shut.

JANET. As a general rule, it's the best thing to do.

CARVE. You advise me to keep my mouth shut?

JANET. Not at all. I simply say, as a general rule it's the best thing to do. But this is no business of mine, and I'm sure I'm not inquisitive.

CARVE [*solemnly*]. He shall go his own way. [*Pause.*] And I'll — go — mine.

JANET [*calmly indifferent*]. That's settled, then.

CARVE [*laughs again to himself, then controls his features*]. And that being settled, the first thing I have to do is to apologize for my behaviour on Tuesday night.

JANET. Oh, not at all. Seeing how upset you were! And then I'm not sure whether I shouldn't have done the same thing myself in your place.

CARVE. Done the same yourself?

JANET. Well, I may be wrong, but it occurred to me your idea was that you'd like to have a look at me before giving yourself away, as it were. Of course, I sent you my photographs, but photographs aren't much better than gravestones — for being reliable, and some folks are prejudiced against matrimonial agencies, even when they make use of them. It's natural. Now I've got no such prejudice. If you want to get married you want to get married, and there you are. It's no use pretending you don't. And there's as much chance of being happy through a matrimonial agency as any other way. At least — that's what *I* think.

CARVE [*collecting his wits*]. Just so.

JANET. You may tell me that people who go to a matrimonial agency stand a chance of getting let in. Well, people who don't go to a matrimonial agency stand a chance of getting let in, too. Besides, I shouldn't give a baby a razor for a birthday present, and I shouldn't advise a young girl to go to a matrimonial agency. But I'm not a young girl. If it's a question of the male sex,

I may say that I've been there before. You understand me?

CARVE. Quite.

JANET. Well, I think I told you pretty nearly everything important in my letter. Didn't I?

CARVE. Let me see now—

JANET. I mean the one I sent to the office of the *Matrimonial News*.

CARVE [*mechanically feeling in his pockets, pulling out papers and putting them back*]. Where did I put it? Oh, perhaps it's in the pocket of another coat.

[*Goes to a coat of* SHAWN'S *hanging on inner knob of double doors, and empties all the pockets, bringing the contents, including a newspaper, to the table.*]

JANET [*picking up an envelope*]. Yes, that's it—I can feel the photograph. You seem to keep things in the pockets of all your coats.

CARVE. If you knew what I've been through this last day or two—

JANET [*soothingly*]. Yes, yes.

CARVE. I haven't had a quiet moment. Now— [*Reading letter.*] "Dear Sir, in reply to your advertisement, I write to you with particulars of my case. I am a widow, aged thirty-two years—"

JANET. And anybody that likes can see my birth certificate. That's what I call talking.

CARVE. My dear lady! [*Continuing to read.*] "Thirty-two years. My father was a jobbing builder, well known in Putney and Wandsworth. My husband was a rent collector and estate agent. He died four years ago of appendicitis [*hesitating*] caught—"

JANET. Caused.

CARVE. I beg pardon, "—caused by accidentally swallowing a bristle out of his tooth-brush, the same being discovered at the operation. I am an orphan, a widow, and have no children. In consequence I feel very lonely, and my first experience not being distasteful, indeed the reverse, I am anxious to try again, provided I can meet with a sincere helpmeet of good family. I am the owner of the above house, rated at forty-five pounds a year, in one of the nicest streets in Putney, and I have private means of some three pounds a week, from brewery shares bringing in fifteen per cent. I will say nothing about my appearance, but enclose latest carte-de-visite photograph."

JANET. I had it taken on purpose.

CARVE. "As to my tastes, I will only say that as a general rule they are quiet. If the above seems in your line, I shall be obliged if you will write and send me particulars of yourself, with photographs.—Yours truly, JANET CANNOT." Well, Mrs. Cannot, your letter is an absolute model.

JANET. I suppose you *did* get dozens?

CARVE. Well—By the way, what's this typewritten thing in the envelope?

JANET [*looking at it*]. It looks like a copy of your answer.

CARVE. Oh!

JANET. If it isn't a rude question, Mr. Shawn, why do you typewrite your letters? It seems so—what shall I say?—public.

CARVE [*half to himself*]. So *that's* the explanation of the typewriter.

JANET [*puzzled*]. I suppose it's because you're a private secretary.

CARVE [*equally puzzled*]. Private secretary! I—shall we just glance through my reply? [*Reads.*] "My dear Mrs. Cannot, your letter inspires me with more confidence than any of the dozens of others I have received." [*They look at each other, smiling.*] "As regards myself, I should state at once that I am and have been for many years private secretary, indeed I may say almost companion, to the celebrated painter, Mr. Ilam Carve, whose magnificent pictures you are doubtless familiar with."

JANET. No, I'm not.

CARVE. Really. "We have been knocking about England together for longer than I care to remember, and I personally am anxious for a change. Our present existence is very expensive. I feel the need of a home and the companionship of just such a woman as yourself. Although a bachelor, I think I am not unfitted for the domestic hearth. My age is forty." That's a mistake of the typewriter.

JANET. Oh!

CARVE. Forty-five it ought to be.

JANET. Well, honestly, I shouldn't have thought it.

CARVE. "My age is forty-five. By a strange coincidence Mr. Carve has suggested to me that we set out for England to-morrow. At Dover I will telegraph you with a rendezvous. In great haste. Till then, my dear Mrs. Cannot, believe me," etc.

JANET. You didn't send a photograph.

CARVE. Perhaps I was afraid of prejudicing you in advance.

JANET [*laughs*]. Eh, Mr. Shawn! There's thousands of young gentlemen alive and kicking in London this minute that would give a great deal to be only half as good looking as you are. And so you're a bachelor?

CARVE. Oh, quite.

JANET. Two bachelors, as you say, knocking about Europe together. [CARVE *laughs quietly but heartily to himself.*] By the way, how is Mr. Carve? I hope he's better.

CARVE. Mr. Carve? . . . [*Suddenly stops laughing.*] Oh! [*Lamely, casually.*] He's dead!

JANET [*shocked*]. Dead? When?

CARVE. Early this morning.

JANET [*rising*]. And us chattering away like this. Why didn't you tell me at once, Mr. Shawn?

CARVE. I forgot for the moment. I wasn't thinking —

JANET. Forgot?

CARVE [*simply and sincerely, but very upset*]. Now, Mrs. Cannot, I assure you I feel that man's death. I admit I had very little affection for him — certainly not much respect — but we'd been together a long time, and his death is a shock to me. Yes, really. But I've had to think so much about my own case — and then a scene, a regular scene with Cyrus Carve. And then you coming. The fact is —

JANET [*sympathetically*]. The fact is, you scarcely know what you're doing, my poor Mr. Shawn. You're on wires, that's what's the matter with you — hysteria. I know what it is as well as anybody. You'll excuse me saying so, but you're no ordinary man. You're one of these highly-strung people and you ought to take care of yourself. Well, I'll go now, and if it's mutually agreeable we might perhaps meet again in a month's time — say.

CARVE. A month? But what am I to do with myself for a month? Do you know you're absolutely the only friend I've got in London — in England. We're never here. I'm an utter stranger. You can't leave me like that — for a month — four weeks — four Sundays. I haven't the least idea what's going to happen to me.

JANET. The very best thing that can happen to you is bed. You go to bed and stop there for a couple of days. There's nothing like it.

CARVE. Yes, but where?

JANET. Why, here of course.

CARVE. I've got to be out of this place in half an hour, less. The fact is, Cyrus Carve has been extremely — er — pert. He's paid me a month's salary and I'm off at once. In under thirty minutes I shall be on the streets.

JANET. I never liked that man. Well, then, you must go to some nice respectable boarding-house.

CARVE. But I don't know any nice respectable boarding-house.

JANET. Oh! There are thousands and thousands in London. Look in the *Telegraph.*

CARVE. I haven't had a paper to-day.

JANET. Any day will do. They're in all the papers every day. What's this? [*Taking up folded dirty newspaper and opening it.*] Now, let's see. Well, what about this? "A beautiful private hotel of the highest class. Luxuriously furnished. Visitors' comfort studied. Finest position in London. Cuisine a specialty. Suitable for persons of superior rank. Bath-room. Electric light. Separate tables. No irritating extras. Single rooms from two and a half guineas. 250 Queen's Gate." Quite close by! [CARVE *says nothing.*] Perhaps that's a bit dear. Here's another. "*Not* a boarding-house. A magnificent mansion. Forty bedrooms by Waring. Superb public saloons by Maple. Parisian chef. Separate

tables. *Four* bathrooms. Card-rooms. Billiard room. Vast lounge. Special sanitation. Young, cheerful, musical society. Bridge (small). Finest position in London. No irritating extras. Single rooms from two guineas." What about that?

CARVE [*shakes his head*]. I don't think I should fancy it.

JANET. I won't say but what two guineas a week is a lot.

CARVE. And I was thinking how cheap it was.

JANET [*staring*]. Well, of course, if you've got money to *fling* about.

CARVE. Upon my soul I don't know what money I have got.

JANET. It'll be just as well to find out before you get into the street.

CARVE. Let's see. Well, there's seven pounds [*showing it*] and this [*pulling silver and gold from another pocket*]. Not much is it? Sixteen shillings and sixpence. It's true I've an annuity of eighty pounds. I was forgetting that.

JANET [*pleased*]. Have you indeed?

CARVE. Yes. But an annuity isn't ready cash, is it?

JANET [*picking up* SHAWN'S *pocket-book*]. And this? This seems rather thick.

CARVE. I was forgetting that too. [*Opens it and takes out many notes.*]

JANET. My word! And you'd forgotten *that!* You ought to see a doctor.

CARVE [*counting*]. Twenty-one fives, and ten tens. That makes two hundred and five pounds. [*Half to himself.*] I always knew I was a bad lot — but where *did* I collar all that from? [*To* JANET.] I know what I shall do! I shall go to the Grand Babylon.

JANET. The Grand Babylon Hotel? But it's the dearest hotel in London.

CARVE. In the big towns we always went to the best hotel. It's cheapest in the end.

JANET. You're very persuasive, but you'll never make me believe you'll save money by staying at the Grand Babylon.

CARVE [*rising and beginning to collect things — tries to fold up a pair of trousers*]. Now, Mrs. Cannot, will you do me a favor?

JANET. You'll spoil these trousers.

CARVE. Will you come and lunch with me at the Grand Babylon to-morrow?

JANET. But I've never been in such a place in my life.

CARVE. Remember. You're my only friend. Will you come and lunch with me at the Grand Babylon to-morrow?

JANET [*timidly*]. I should like to. [*Suddenly.*] Here, give me those trousers, do!

[*She takes hold of one leg,* CARVE *retaining the other.*]

[*Enter* CYRUS CARVE.]

CYRUS. Oh!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE. I.—*Private sitting-room at the Grand Babylon Hotel, Strand. Luxurious in the hotel manner. Telephone. Door,* L., *leading to corridor. Door,* R. *(up stage), leading to bedroom. Another door (not used) leading by a passage to bathroom.*

TIME.—*About noon on the following day.*

[ILAM CARVE *and* JANET *are talking together.*]

CARVE. I'm really delighted to see you.

JANET [*examining his features*]. But surely you're not feeling very well?

CARVE. I'm not. Perhaps it's these sleepless nights I've had.

JANET. You're shivering.

CARVE. I was wearing my dressing-gown. I nearly always do when I'm alone. Do you think you'd mind if I put it on again.

JANET. Do you mean to say you took it off because of me? [*Seizing dressing-gown firmly.*] Mr. Shawn, will you oblige me by getting into this at once? [*She helps him on with dressing-gown.*] What a beauty!

CARVE. Yes. Cousin Cyrus thought so too. He didn't want me to bring it

away. Still, I beat him on *that* point. [JANET *arranges the collar.*] Do you know, you do me good.

JANET. I should think so. I suppose when gentlemen live alone they're pretty nearly always unwell, as it were. If it isn't a cold, it's stomach, I expect. And truly, I'm not surprised, the way they go on! Now, will you sit down in that chair and keep your legs covered — August or no August! If you ask me, it's influenza you're sickening for. [*Sound of distant orchestra.*] Music?

CARVE [*nodding and sitting down in easy chair*]. Well, and what's the news from outside? I haven't stirred since yesterday noon.

JANET. Seems to me there's no news except your Mr. Carve's death.

CARVE. Really! Is it so much talked about as all that?

JANET. It's on all the posters — very big. All along Piccadilly and Trafalgar Square and the Strand the newspaper boys, and the newspaper old men too, are wearing it like aprons, as it were. I read the *Telegraph* myself. There was nearly a page of it in the *Telegraph.*

CARVE [*staggered*]. Nearly a page of it in the *Telegraph?*

JANET. Yes, besides a leading article. Haven't you —

CARVE. I never read obituaries of artists in the papers.

JANET. Neither do I. But I should have thought *you* would.

CARVE. Well, they make me angry. Obituaries of archbishops aren't so bad. Newspapers seem to understand archbishops. But when they begin about artists — you cannot imagine the astounding nonsense they talk.

JANET [*protesting against his heat*]. Now! You're still all on wires. Why should that make you angry?

CARVE. What did the *Telegraph* say? Did you look at it?

JANET. Oh yes. It appears Mr. Carve was a very eccentric person — avoiding society and so on.

CARVE [*resentful*]. Eccentric! There you are! He wasn't eccentric in the least. The only society he avoided was the society of gaping fools.

JANET. Well, I'm just telling you what it said. Then, let me see — what else did it say? Oh! It said the sole question was whether Mr. Carve was the greatest painter since Velasquez — is that how you pronounce it? — or whether he was the greatest painter that ever lived.

CARVE [*interested*]. Really! It said that?

JANET [*nodding*]. You ought to read it.

CARVE. Upon my soul I think I must. [*Attempts to rise.*]

JANET. Now, please, don't move. What is it you want?

CARVE. I was only going to telephone and have the daily papers sent up.

JANET. Where is the telephone?

CARVE [*pointing*]. There.

JANET. So they've put a telephone in your room?

CARVE. Telephone in every room.

JANET [*going to telephone*]. Can I telephone for you? I never have telephoned, and I should like to. How do you do it?

CARVE. Just take that thing off the hook and talk into it. [JANET *gingerly obeys.*] It won't explode.

JANET. What am I to say?

CARVE. Tell them to send me up the daily papers at once.

JANET. All?

CARVE. Yes.

JANET. But will they?

CARVE. Certainly.

JANET [*into telephone*]. Please will you send up all the daily papers at once.

CARVE. Thanks very much. Now you can hang it up again.

JANET. So this is the Grand Babylon Hotel? Well it's a queer place.

[*Her eyes rove round the room.*]

CARVE. What are you looking for?

JANET. To speak plainly, I was looking for the bed. I must say I was rather surprised when the young man at the desk said I was to go up to your room. . . . But really, everything's so nicely arranged. . . . I suppose it's one of those folding beds that turn into bookcases and things?

CARVE [*laughs*]. No. This is my sitting-room.

JANET. Your sitting-room? [*Pointing to door,* R.] Then that's the bedroom?

CARVE. Yes.

JANET [*pointing to another door*]. And what's that?

CARVE. That's one way to my bathroom. In a big hotel I always take a suite, you know. It's so much more comfortable.

JANET. Isn't it rather expensive?

CARVE. To tell you the truth, I didn't ask the price.

[*Knock at door.*]

JANET [*charmingly tart*]. I suppose it's what you call "cheapest in the end."

CARVE. Come in.

[*Enter* PAGE *with a pile of papers.*]

CARVE. Thanks! Give them to me.

[*Exit* PAGE.]

JANET. Well, I never! It's like magic.

CARVE. Now let's just glance at these chaps. [*Unfolding a paper.*]

JANET. Shall I help you?

CARVE. Why? Here 's black borders and a heading across two columns! "Death of England's greatest painter," "Irreparable loss to the world's art," "Our readers will be shocked—" Are they all like that? [*More and more astonished; takes another paper.*] "Sad death of a great genius."

JANET [*handing him still another paper*]. And this.

CARVE. "London's grief." "The news will come as a personal blow to every lover of great painting." But—but—I'd no notion of this. [*Half to himself.*] It's terrible.

JANET. Well, perhaps always living with him you wouldn't realize how important he was, would you?

[*Distant music begins again, a waltz tune.*]

CARVE [*reading*]. Although possibly something of a poseur in his choice of subjects . . ." The fellow's a fool. Poseur indeed!

JANET. Look at this. "Europe in mourning."

CARVE. Well—well.

JANET. What *is* that music?

CARVE. London's grief. It's the luncheon orchestra downstairs.

[*Telephone bell rings.*]

CARVE. Never mind it. Let 'em ring. I understand now why journalists and so on have been trying all day to see me. Honestly I'm—I'm staggered.

[*Telephone bell continues to ring.*]

JANET. It's a funny notion of comfort having a telephone in every room. How long will it keep on like that?

CARVE. I'll stop it. [*Rising.*]

JANET. No, no. [*Going to telephone and taking receiver.*] Yes? What's the matter? [*Listens. To* CARVE.] Oh, what do you think? Father Looe and his sister, Miss Honoria Looe, want to see you.

CARVE. Father Looe? Never heard of him.

JANET. Oh, but you must have heard of him. He's the celebrated Roman Catholic preacher. He's a beautiful man. I heard him preach once on the Sins of Society.

CARVE. Would you mind saying I'm not at home?

JANET [*obviously disappointed*]. Then won't you see him?

CARVE. Did *you* want to see him?

JANET. I should like just to have had a look at him close to, as it were.

CARVE [*gallantly*]. Then you shall. Tell them to send him up, will you?

JANET. And am I to stay here?

CARVE. Of course.

JANET. Well, if anybody had told me this time last week—[*Into telephone.*] Please ask them to come up.

CARVE. Perhaps with your being here I shan't be quite so shy.

JANET. Shy! Are you shy? It was said in the *Telegraph* that Mr. Carve was painfully shy.

CARVE [*protesting*]. Painfully! Who told them that, I should like to know?

JANET. Now shyness is a thing I simply can't understand. I'm never shy. And you don't strike me as shy—far from it.

CARVE. It's very curious. I haven't felt a bit shy with you.

JANET. Nobody ever is shy with

me. . . . [*Ironically.*] I must say I'd give something to see *you* shy.

[*Enter* FATHER LOOE *and* HONORIA LOOE, *announced by* PAGE.]

LOOE [*stopping near door, at a loss*]. Pardon me — Mr. Shawn — Mr. Albert Shawn?

CARVE [*rising, perturbed*]. Yes.

LOOE. This is your room?

CARVE. Yes.

LOOE. I'm afraid there's some mistake. I was given to understand that you were the — er — valet of the late Mr. Ilam Carve.

HONORIA. Yes. Mr. Cyrus Carve told us —

JANET [*coming to* CARVE'S *rescue as he remains speechless, very calmly*]. Now there's another trick of Mr. Cyrus Carve's! Valet indeed! Mr. Shawn was Mr. Carve's secretary — and almost companion.

LOOE. Ten thousand apologies. Ten thousand apologies. I felt sure —

CARVE. Please sit down.

[*With special gallantry towards* HONORIA.]

JANET. And will you sit down too, Mr. Shawn? [*To the* LOOES.] He's not at all well. That's why he's wearing his dressing-gown.

CARVE [*introducing*]. My friend, Mrs. Janet Cannot.

LOOE. Now, Mr. Shawn, if you know anything about me, if you have heard me preach, if you have read any of my books, you are probably aware that I am a man who goes straight to the point, hating subtleties. In connection with your late employer's death a great responsibility is laid upon me, and I have come to you for information — information which I have failed to obtain either from Mr. Cyrus Carve, or the doctor, or the nurse. . . . Was Mr. Carve a Catholic?

CARVE. A Catholic?

LOOE. He came of a Catholic family, did he not?

CARVE. Yes — I believe so.

LOOE. The cousin, Mr. Cyrus Carve, I regret to say, denies the faith of his childhood — denies it, I also regret to say, with a vivacity that amounts almost to bad manners. In fact, he was extremely rude to me when I tried to give him some idea of the tremendous revival of Catholicism which is the outstanding feature of intellectual life in England to-day.

CARVE. Ilam Carve was not a Catholic.

LOOE. Mind, I do not ask if he died in the consolations of the faith. I know that he did not. I have learnt that it occurred to neither you nor the doctor nor the nurse to send for a priest. Strange omission. But not the fault of the dying man.

CARVE. Ilam Carve was not a Catholic.

LOOE. Then what was he?

CARVE. Nothing in particular.

LOOE. Then I claim him. Then I claim him. . . . Honoria!

CARVE [*in a new tone*]. Look here — what's all this about?

LOOE [*rising*]. I will tell you at once what it is about, Mr. Shawn. There is a question of Ilam Carve being buried in Westminster Abbey.

CARVE [*thunderstruck*]. Buried in Westminster Abbey?

LOOE. Lady Leonard Alcar has consulted me about the matter. I may say that I have the honor to be her spiritual director. Probably you know that Lord Leonard Alcar owns the finest collection of Ilam Carve's pictures in Europe.

JANET. I've often wondered who it is that settles whether people shall be buried in the Abbey or not. So it's Lady Leonard Alcar!

LOOE. Not exactly! Not exactly! But Lady Leonard Alcar is a great lady. She has vast influence. The most influential convert to Catholicism of the last thirty years. She is aunt to no less than four dukes, and Lord Leonard is uncle to two others.

CARVE [*ironically*]. I quite see.

LOOE [*eagerly*]. You see — don't you? Her advice on these matters carries enormous weight. A suggestion from her amounts to — to —

CARVE. A decree absolute.

JANET [*simply*]. Is she what they call the ruling classes?

LOOE [*bows*]. Lady Leonard and I have talked the matter over, and I pointed out to her that if this great genius was a member of the Church of England and if the sorrowing nation at large deems him worthy of the supreme honor of a national funeral, then by all means let him be buried in the Abbey. But if he was a Catholic, then I claim him for Westminster Cathedral, that magnificent fane which we have raised as a symbol of our renewed vitality. Now, was he a member of the Church of England?

CARVE [*loudly*]. Decidedly not.

LOOE. Good! Then I claim him. I detest casuistry and I claim him. I have only one other question. You knew him well — intimately — for many years. On your conscience, Mr. Shawn, what interment in your opinion would he himself have preferred?

JANET [*after a pause*]. It wouldn't make much difference to him either way, would it?

CARVE [*with an outburst*]. The whole thing is preposterous.

LOOE [*ignoring the outburst*]. My course seems quite clear. I shall advise Lady Leonard —

CARVE. Don't you think you're rather young to be in sole charge of this country?

LOOE [*smoothly*]. My dear sir, I am nothing but a humble priest who gives counsel when counsel is sought. And I may say that in this affair of the interment of our great national painter, there are other influences than mine. For instance, my sister, Honoria, who happens also to be president of the Ladies' Water Color Society — [*gesture of alarm from Carve*] — my sister has a great responsibility. She is the favorite niece of — [*Whispers in* CARVE'S *ear.*] Consequently —

[*Makes an impressive pause.*]

HONORIA. You see my uncle is a bachelor and I keep house for him. Anselm used to live with us too, until he left the Church.

LOOE. Until I *joined* the Church, Honoria. Now Honoria wishes to be perfectly fair; she entirely realizes her responsibility; and that is why she has come with me to see you.

JANET [*benignantly*]. So that's how these things are decided! I see I'd got quite a wrong notion of politics and so on.

HONORIA. Oh, Mr. Shawn —— and

JANET. My idea was —

[*Together.*]

JANET. I beg your pardon.

HONORIA. I beg yours.

JANET. Granted.

HONORIA. There's one question I should like to ask you, Mr. Shawn. In water-colors did Mr. Carve use Chinese white freely or did he stick to transparent color, like the old English school? I wonder if you understand me?

CARVE [*interested*]. He used Chinese white like anything.

HONORIA. Oh! I'm so glad. You remember that charming water-color of the Venetian gondolier in the Luxembourg. We had a great argument after we got home last Easter as to whether the oar was put in with Chinese white — or just 'left out,' you know!

CARVE. Chinese white, of course. My notion is that it doesn't matter a fig how you get effects so long as you do get them.

HONORIA. And that was his notion too?

[*Telephone bell rings,* JANET *answers it.*]

CARVE. His? Rather. You bet it was.

HONORIA. I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I knew I was right about Chinese white. Oh, Anselm, do let him be buried in the Abbey! Do let me suggest to uncle —

LOOE. My dear girl, ask your conscience. Enthusiasm for art I can comprehend; I can even sympathize with it. But if this grave national question is to be decided by considerations of Chinese white —

[CARVE *turns to* JANET *as if for succor.*]

JANET [*calmly*]. The doctor is just coming up.

CARVE. The doctor? What doctor?

JANET. A Dr. Horning. He says he's Dr. Pascoe's assistant and he attended Mr. Carve, and he wants to see you.

CARVE. But I don't want to see him.

JANET. You'll have to see a doctor.

CARVE. Why?

JANET. Because you're ill. So you may just as well see this one as another. They're all pretty much of a muchness.

[*Enter* PETER HORNING *boisterously. A* PAGE BOY *opens the door but does not announce him.*]

PETER [*perceiving* LOOE *first.*] Ah, Father! You here? How d'ye do? What did you think of my special on last Sunday's sermon?

[*Shakes hands with* LOOE *and bows to* MISS LOOE *as to an acquaintance.*]

LOOE. Very good. Very good.

PETER [*advancing to* CARVE]. Mr. Shawn, I presume?

CARVE [*glancing helplessly at* JANET]. But this isn't the doctor?

PETER [*volubly*]. Admitted! Admitted! I'm only his brother — a journalist. I'm on the *Courier* and the *Mercury* and several other Worgan papers. One of our chaps failed to get into this room this morning, so I came along to try what *I* could do. You see what I've done.

JANET. Well, I never came across such a set of people in my life.

PETER [*aside to* LOOE]. Is he in service here, or what?

LOOE. Mr. Shawn was Mr. Carve's secretary and companion, not his valet.

PETER [*puzzled, but accepting the situation*]. Ah! So much the better. Now, Mr. Shawn, can you tell me authoritatively whether shortly before his death Mr. Carve was engaged to be married under romantic circumstances to a lady of high rank?

HONORIA. Indeed!

CARVE. Who told you that?

PETER. Then he was!

CARVE. I've nothing to say.

PETER. You won't tell me her name?

CARVE. I've nothing to say.

PETER. Secondly, I'm instructed to offer something considerable for your signature to an account of Ilam Carve's eccentric life on the Continent.

CARVE. Eccentric life on the Continent!

PETER. I shouldn't keep you half an hour — three quarters at most. A hundred pounds. Cash down, you know. Bank notes. All you have to do is to sign.

CARVE [*to* JANET, *exhausted but disdainful*]. I wouldn't mind signing an order for the fellow's execution.

PETER. A hundred and fifty!

CARVE. Or burning at the stake.

PETER [*to* LOOE]. What does he say?

LOOE. Mr. Shawn is indisposed. We've just been discussing the question of the burial in the Abbey. I think I may say, if it interests you as an item of news, that Ilam Carve will not be buried in the Abbey.

PETER [*lightly*]. Oh yes he will. Father. There was a little doubt about it until we got particulars of his will this morning. But his will settled it.

LOOE. His will?

PETER. Yes. Didn't you know? No, you wouldn't. Well, his estate will come out at about a couple of hundred thousand, and he's left it practically all for an International Gallery of Modern Art in London. Very ingenious plan. None of your Chantrey Bequest business. Three pictures and one piece of sculpture are to be bought each year in London. Fixed price £400 each, large or small. Trustees are to be business men — bank directors. But they can't choose the works. The works are to be chosen by the students at South Kensington and the Academy Schools. Works by R.A.'s and A.R.A.'s are absolutely barred. Works by students themserves absolutely barred, too. Cute that, eh? That's the arrangement for England. Similar arrangements for France, Italy, and Germany. He gives the thing a start by making it a present of his own collection — stored somewhere in Paris. I don't mean his own paintings — he bars those. Unusually modest, eh?

HONORIA. How perfectly splendid! We shall have a real live gallery at last. Surely Anselm, after that—

LOOE. Quite beside the point. I shall certainly oppose.

PETER. Oppose what?

LOOE. The burial in the Abbey. I shall advise Lady Leonard Alcar—

PETER. No use, Father. Take my word. The governor's made up his mind. He's been fearfully keen on art lately. I don't know why. We were in front of everybody else with the news of Ilam Carve's death and the governor's making a regular pet of him. He says it's quite time we buried an artist in Westminster Abbey, and he's given instructions to the whole team. Didn't you see the *Mercury* this morning? Anybody who opposes a national funeral for Ilam Carve will be up against the governor. Of course, I tell you that as a friend—confidentially.

LOOE [*shaken*]. Well, I shall see what Lady Leonard says.

CARVE [*rising in an angry, scornful outburst*]. You'd bury him in Westminster Abbey because he's a philanthropist, not because he's an artist. That's England all over. . . . Well, I'm hanged if I'll have it.

LOOE. But, my dear sir—

CARVE. And I tell you another thing—he's not dead.

PETER. Not dead—what next?

CARVE. *I* am Ilam Carve.

HONORIA [*soothingly*]. Poor dear! He's not himself.

CARVE. That's just what I am.

[*Sinks back exhausted.*]

PETER [*aside to* LOOE]. Is he mad, Father? Nothing but a clerk after all. And yet he takes a private room at the Grand Babylon, and then he refuses a hundred and fifty of the best and goes on like this. And now, blessed if he isn't Ilam Carve! [*Laughs.*]

LOOE. I really think we ought to leave.

HONORIA [*to* JANET]. He's a little unhinged! But how charming he is.

JANET [*prudently resenting* HONORIA'S *interest in* CARVE]. Yes, he's a little unhinged. And who wouldn't be?

PETER. Got 'em—if you ask me!

[*Moving to leave.*]

LOOE [*moving to leave*]. Honoria.

JANET [*very soothingly and humoringly to* CARVE]. So this is what you call being shy!

CARVE [*to* JANET, *who is now bending over him*]. It must be stopped.

JANET [*as the others go out; humoring him.*] Yes, yes! [*Absently in reply to bows and adieux of* LOOE, HONORIA, *and* PETER HORNING.] Good morning! [*When they are gone, with a sigh of relief.*] Well, it is a mighty queer place! My word, how cold your hands are! [*Going quickly to telephone and speaking into telephone.*] Please send up two hot-water bottles at once. Yes, hot-water bottles. Never heard of a hot-water bottle before?

[*The Stage is darkened for a few moments to indicate the passage of time.*]

SCENE 2

TIME.—*Afternoon, four days later.*

[JANET *is dozing in an easy-chair.*]

[*Enter* CARVE *in his dressing-gown.*

JANET [*starting up*]. Mr. Shawn, what are you doing out of bed? After such a dose of flu as you've had!

CARVE. I'm doing nothing out of bed.

[*Twiddles his thumbs.*]

JANET. But you've no right to be out of bed at all.

CARVE. I was afrraid I hadn't. But I called and called, and there was no answer. So then I began to argue the point. Why not get up? I'd had a tremendous long sleep. I felt singularly powerful. And I thought you'd gone home.

JANET. Nay—that you never did!

CARVE. I did, honestly.

JANET. Do you mean to say you thought for a single moment I should go home and leave you like that?

CARVE. Yes. But of course I thought you might be coming back sooner or later.

JANET. Well I never!

CARVE. You've scarcely left me for three days and three nights, Mrs. Cannot, so far as I remember. Surely it was natural for me to suppose that you'd gone home to your own affairs.

JANET [*sarcastically*]. It didn't occur to you I might have dropped off to sleep?

CARVE. Now, don't be angry. I'm only convalescent.

JANET. Will you kindly march right back to bed this instant?

CARVE. No, I'm dashed if I do!

JANET. I beg pardon.

CARVE. I say, I'm dashed if I do! I won't stir until I've thanked you. I've been ill I don't know how many times; but this is the first time in my life I've ever enjoyed being ill. D'you know [*with an ingenuous smile*], I'd really no idea what nursing was.

JANET [*drily*]. Hadn't you? Well, if you call *that* nursing, I don't. But it was the best I could do in this barracks, with the kitchen a mile and a half off, and a pack of men that can't understand English gaping at you all day in evening-dress. I dare say this is a very good hotel for reading newspapers in. But if you want anything that isn't on the menu, it's as bad as drawing money out of the postoffice savings bank. You should see me nurse in my own house.

CARVE. I should like to. Even in this barracks [*imitating her*] you've quite altered my views of life.

JANET. Yes, and they wanted altering. When I think of you and that other poor fellow wandering about all alone on that Continent — without the slightest notion of what comfort is. . . . Well, I'll say this — it's a pleasure to nurse you. Now, will you go back to bed?

CARVE. I suppose coffee's on the menu?

JANET. Coffee?

CARVE. I think I should like some *café au lait*, and a roll.

JANET [*rising*]. You can have hot milk if you like.

CARVE. All right. And then when I've had it I'll go to bed.

JANET [*at telephone*]. Are you there?

CARVE [*picking up a sheet of paper from table*]. Hello! What's this? Hotel bill — receipted?

JANET. I should think so indeed! They sent it up the second day. [*Into telephone.*] Hot milk, please, and let it *be* hot! [*Hanging up telephone. To* CARVE.] I expect they were afraid for their money.

CARVE. And you paid it?

JANET. I took the money out of your pockets and I just paid it. I never said a word. But if you hadn't been ill I should have said something. Of all the swindles, of all the barefaced swindles! . . . Do you see what it's costing you to live here — a day?

CARVE. Oh, not much above four pounds, I hope.

JANET [*speechless at first*]. Any woman that knows her business could keep you for a month — a month — for less than you spend here in a day — and better. *And* better! Look here: "Biscuits, 1s. 6d.!"

CARVE. Well?

JANET. Well [*confidentially earnest*], will you believe me when I tell you there wasn't a pennyworth of biscuits on that plate? Do you think I don't know what biscuits are a pound?

CARVE. Really!

JANET [*ironically*]. "Cheapest in the end" — but I should say the end's a long way off.

CARVE [*who has picked up another paper, on mantelpiece*]. What? "Admit Mr. Albert Shawn to Westminster Abbey, cloisters entrance. . . . Funeral . . . Tuesday." . . . That's to-day, isn't it?

JANET. Yes.

CARVE [*moved*]. But you told me he wasn't going to be buried in Westminster Abbey.

JANET. I know.

CARVE. You told me Cyrus Carve had insisted on cremation.

JANET [*with vivacity*]. And what did you expect me to tell you? I had to soothe you somehow; you were just about delirious. I was afraid if I told you the truth you'd be doing something

silly — seeing the state you were in. Then it struck me a nice plain cremation at Woking was the very thing to keep you quiet.

CARVE [*still more moved*]. Then he's . . . Westminster Abbey!

JANET. Yes, I should say all is over by this time. There were thousands of people for the lying-in-state, it seems.

CARVE. But it's awful. Absolutely awful.

JANET. Why is it awful?

CARVE. I told you — I explained the whole thing to you.

JANET [*humoring, remonstrating*]. Mr. Shawn, surely you've got rid of that idea! You aren't delirious now. You said you were convalescent, you know.

CARVE. There'll be a perfect Hades of a row. I must write to the Dean at once. I must —

JANET [*soothingly*]. I shouldn't if I were you. Why not let things be? No one would believe that tale —

CARVE. Do you believe it?

JANET [*perfunctorily*]. Oh yes.

CARVE. No, you don't. Honestly, do you now?

JANET. Well — [*Knock at door.*] Come in. [*Enter* WAITER *with hot milk.*] Here's your hot milk.

WAITER. Miss Looe has called.

CARVE. I must see her.

JANET. But —

CARVE. I *must* see her.

JANET. Oh, very well. [*Exit* WAITER.] She's telephoned each day to inquire how you were. She asked if you wanted a seat for the funeral. I told her you couldn't possibly go, but I was sure you'd like to be invited — whether it was the Abbey or not. Please don't forget your milk.

[*Enter* HONORIA LOOE *in mourning, introduced by* WAITER.]

HONORIA [*coming in quickly, bowing to* JANET *and shaking hands with* CARVE]. Good afternoon. Please don't rise. I've heard how ill you've been. I've only called because I simply had to.

CARVE. It's very kind of you.

HONORIA. Oh, Mr. Shawn, I know you didn't want him to be buried in the Abbey. I'm all for quiet funerals, too; but really this was an exceptional case, and I think if you'd seen it you'd have been glad they did decide on the Abbey. Oh, you've no idea how impressive it was! The Abbey is always so fine, isn't it? And it was crammed. You never saw such a multitude of distinguished people. I mean really distinguished — all in black, except, of course, the uniforms. Royalties, ambassadors, representatives from all the academies all over Europe. Rodin was there!! The whole of artistic London came. I don't mean only painters, but poets, novelists, sculptors, and musicians. The art students had a corner to themselves. And you should have seen the crowds outside. All traffic was stopped up as far as Trafalgar Square. I've had some difficulty in getting here. The sun was shining through the stained glass. And the music was magnificent. And then when the coffin was carried down the nave — well, there was only one wreath on the pall — just one — a white crown. All the other wreaths were piled near the screen — scores and scores of them — the effect was tremendous. I nearly cried. A lot of people did cry. [*Genuinely moved.*] There was that great genius lying there. He'd never done anything except put paint on canvas, and yet — and yet. . . . Well, it made you feel somehow that England does care for art after all.

CARVE [*after a pause*]. And whom have we to thank for this beautiful national manifestation of sympathy with art?

HONORIA. How do you mean?

CARVE [*with an attempt at cold irony, but yet in a voice imperfectly controlled*]. Did your brother relent and graciously permit Lady Leonard Alcar to encourage a national funeral? Or was it due solely to the influence of the newspapers written by people of refined culture like the man who gave his opinion the other day that I had got 'em. Or perhaps you yourself settled it with your esteemed uncle over a cup of tea?

HONORIA. Of course, Mr. Shawn, any one can see that you're artistic yourself, and artists are generally very sarcastic about the British public. I know I am. . . . Now, don't you paint?

CARVE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. I used to — a little.

HONORIA. I was sure of it. Well, you can be as sarcastic as you like, but do you know what I was thinking during the service? I was thinking that if only he could have seen it — if only Ilam Carve could have seen it — instead of lying cold in that coffin under that wreath, — he'd — [*Hesitatingly.*]

CARVE [*interrupting her, in a different, resolved tone*]. Miss Looe, I suppose you're on very confidential terms with your uncle.

HONORIA. Naturally. Why?

CARVE. Will you give him a message from me. He'll do perhaps better than anybody.

HONORIA. With pleasure.

CARVE [*moved*]. It is something important — very important indeed. In fact —

[JANET *goes into bedroom, but keeping near the doorway does not actually disappear.*]

HONORIA [*soothingly, and a little frightened*]. Now, please, Mr. Shawn! Please don't frighten us as you did the other day. Please do try and keep calm!

CARVE. I —

[*He suddenly stands up and then falls back again into chair.*]

[JANET *returns quickly to the room.*]

HONORIA [*alarmed, to* JANET]. I'm afraid he isn't quite well yet.

CARVE. No, I can't tell you. At least, not now. Thanks very much for calling.

[*Rises brusquely and walks towards the bedroom door.*]

JANET [*to* HONORIA]. He's not really strong enough to see visitors.

HONORIA [*going to door and trying to be confidential*]. What *is* it?

JANET [*with tranquillity*]. Oh, influenza. Sometimes it takes 'em in the head and sometimes in the stomach. It's taken him in the head.

HONORIA. Charming man! I don't suppose there's the least likelihood of it — he's evidently very well off — but if he *should* be wanting a situation similar to his last, I'm sure my uncle —

JANET [*positively and curtly*]. I don't think so.

HONORIA. Of course you know him very well?

JANET. Well, it's like this. I'm his cousin. We aren't exactly engaged to be married —

HONORIA [*in a changed tone*]. Oh, I see! Good afternoon.

JANET. Good afternoon.

[*Exit* HONORIA.]

CARVE [*who has hesitatingly wandered back towards center, in a quite different tone now that he is alone again with* JANET]. What's this about being engaged to be married?

JANET [*smiling*]. I was telling her we weren't engaged to be married. That's true, I suppose?

CARVE. But are we cousins?

JANET. Yes. I've got my reputation to think about. I don't want to coddle it, but there's no harm in just keeping an eye on it.

CARVE. I see. [*sits down.*]

JANET. If nothing comes of all this —

CARVE. All what?

JANET. All this illness and nursing and sitting up at nights, — then I'm just your cousin, and no harm done.

CARVE. But do you mean to say you'd —

JANET [*stopping him*]. Not so fast! [*Pause. She continues reflectively.*] Do you know what struck me while her ladyship was telling you about all the grand doings at the funeral! — What good has it ever done *him* to be celebrated and make a big splash in the world? Was he any happier for it? From all I can hear he was always trying to hide just as if the police were after him. He never had the slightest notion of comfort, and so you needn't tell me! And there's another thing — you needn't tell me he wasn't always worrying about

some girl or other, because I know he was. A bachelor at his age never thinks about anything else — morning, noon, and night. It stands to reason — and they can say what they like, I know. And now he's dead — probably because he'd no notion of looking after himself, and it's been in all the papers how wonderful he was, and florists' girls have very likely sat up half the night making wreaths, and Westminster Abbey was crowded out with fashionable folk — and do you know what all those fashionable folk are thinking about just now — tea! And if it isn't tea, it's whisky and soda.

CARVE. But you mustn't forget that he was really very successful indeed. . . . Just look at the money he made, for instance.

JANET. Well, if sovereigns had been any use to him he'd never have left two hundred thousand of them behind him — him with no family. No, he was no better than a fool with money. Couldn't even spend it.

CARVE. He had the supreme satisfaction of doing what he enjoyed better than anybody else could do it.

JANET. And what was that?

CARVE. Painting.

JANET [*casually*]. Oh! and couldn't he have had that without running about all over Europe? He might just as well have been a commercial traveller. Take my word for it, Mr. Shawn, there's nothing like a comfortable home and a quiet life — and the less you're in the newspapers the better.

CARVE [*thoughtfully*]. Do you know — a good deal of what you say applies to me.

JANET. And *you*, now! As we're on the subject — before we go any further — you're a bachelor of forty-five, same as him. What have you been doing with yourself lately?

CARVE. Doing with myself?

JANET. Well, I think I ought to ask because when I was stealing [*with a little nervous laugh*] the money out of your pocket to pay that hotel bill, I came across a lady's photograph. I couldn't help coming across it. Seeing how things are, I think I ought to ask.

CARVE. Oh, *that!* It must be a photograph of the lady *he* was engaged to. He broke it off, you know. That was why we came to London in such a hurry.

JANET. Then it is true — what the newspaper reporter said? [CARVE *nods.*] One of the aristocracy — [CARVE *nods.*] Who was she?

CARVE. Lady Alice Rowfant.

JANET. What was it doing in your pocket?

CARVE. I don't know. Everything got mixed up. Clothes, papers, everything.

JANET. Sure?

CARVE. Of course! Look here, do you suppose Lady Alice Rowfant is anything to *me?*

JANET. She isn't?

CARVE. No.

JANET. Honestly?

[*Looking at him closely.*]

CARVE. Honestly.

JANET [*with obvious relief*]. Well, that's all right then! Now will you drink this milk, please.

CARVE. I wanted to tell you —

JANET. Will you drink this milk?

[*Pours out a glassful for him.*]

[CARVE *addresses himself to the milk.*]

[JANET *begins to put on her things.*]

CARVE. But I say, what are you doing?

JANET. I'm going home.

CARVE. What? Now?

JANET. At once.

CARVE. But you can't leave me like this. I'm very ill.

JANET. Oh no, you aren't. You're very much better. Anyone can see that. All you've got to do is to return to bed and stick to slops.

CARVE. And when shall you come back?

JANET. You might come down to see me one day at Putney.

CARVE. I shall be delighted to. But before that, won't you come here?

JANET [*after a pause*]. I'll try and come the day after to-morrow.

CARVE. Why not to-morrow?

JANET. Well, a couple of days without me'll do you no harm. It's a mistake to be in a hurry when you've got all your life in front of you.

CARVE [*after a pause*]. Listen — have some tea before you go.

JANET. No. [*Holds out her hand, smiling.*] Good afternoon. Now do go to bed.

CARVE. I haven't *begun* to thank you.

JANET. No — and I hope you won't begin.

CARVE. You're so sudden.

JANET. It's sudden or nothing.

CARVE [*holding her hand*]. I say — what can you see in me?

JANET. Well, if it comes to that — what can you see in me?

[*Withdrawing her hand.*]

CARVE. I — I don't know what it is. . . . Something. . . . [*Lightly.*] I dunno! Everything!

JANET. That's too much. Good-bye! I'll come about this time the day after to-morrow.

CARVE. Supposing I have a relapse?

JANET [*at door*]. You won't if you do as I tell you.

CARVE. But supposing I do?

JANET. Well, you can always telegraph, can't you?

[*Exit.*]

(CARVE, *after finishing milk, suddenly gets up and searches on writing table: he then goes to the telephone.*]

CARVE [*into telephone*]. Please send me up a telegraph form.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 1

Parlor in Janet's house in Putney. A perfectly ordinary suburban interior of a small house; but comfortable. Table in center. Door, R., *up stage, leading to hall. Door,* L., *down stage, leading to kitchen and back premises.*

TIME — *Morning in early autumn. Rather more than two years have elapsed.*

Discovered — CARVE *reading newspaper at breakfast-table.* JANET *in an apron is hovering busily near him.*

JANET [*putting cigarettes and matches down beside* CARVE]. Want anything else, dear? [*No answer from* CARVE.] Because I must set about my morning's work. [CARVE *continues to read.*] Albert, are you sure you don't want anything else?

[*As he still gives her no sign of attention, she snatches the paper away from him, and throws it on the floor.*]

CARVE [*not having moved his eyes*]. The pattern of this jug is really not so bad. . . . Yes, my soul?

JANET. I've asked you I don't know how many times whether you want anything else, because I must set about my morning's work.

CARVE. Is there any more coffee?

JANET. Yes, plenty.

CARVE. Hot?

JANET. Yes.

CARVE. Then I don't want any. Got any bacon?

JANET. No, but I can cook a slice in a minute.

CARVE [*with an affectation of martyrdom*]. Doesn't matter.

JANET. Oh yes, I will.

[*Moving away.*]

CARVE [*drawing her to him by her apron*]. Can't you see he's teasing you?

JANET. She's got no time in the morning for being teased.

[*She takes a cigarette, lights it and immediately puts it in his mouth.*]

CARVE. And now you're going to leave me?

JANET. Sure you're all right? [*He nods.*] Quite sure you're happy?

CARVE. Jane —

JANET. I wish you wouldn't call me Jane.

CARVE. But I will call you Jane. Jane, why do you ask me if I'm sure I'm happy? When a man has first-class

food and first-class love, together with a genuine French bed, really waterproof boots, a constant supply of hot water in the bathroom, enough money to buy cigarettes and sixpenny editions, the freedom to do what he likes all day and every day — and — let me see, what else — a complete absence of domestic servants — then either that man is happy or he is a silly cuckoo!

JANET. You aren't getting tired —

CARVE. My sweet child, what's the matter with you?

JANET. Nothing, nothing. Only today's the second anniversary of our wedding — and you've — you've said nothing about it.

CARVE [*after a shocked pause*]. And I forgot it last year, didn't I? I shall be forgetting my dinner next.

JANET. Oh no, you won't!

CARVE. And yet all last week I was thinking about this most important day, and telling myself I must remember it.

JANET. Very easy to say that. But how can you prove it?

CARVE. Well, it does just happen that the proof is behind the sideboard.

JANET. A present?

CARVE. A present. It was all ready and waiting five days ago.

JANET [*drawing a framed picture from behind the sideboard, and trying to hide her disappointment, but not quite succeeding*]. Oh! A picture! Who is it? [*Examines it with her nose close to it.*]

CARVE. No, no. You can't take a picture like snuff! Get away from it, [*He jumps up, snatches the picture from her, and exposes it on a chair at the other side of the room.*] Now!

[*He sits down again.*]

JANET. Yes, it doesn't look quite so queer like that. Those are my cooking sleeves, and that seems a bit like my kitchen — that's my best copper pan! Is the young woman meant to be me?

CARVE. Well, not to beat about the bush, yes.

JANET. I don't consider it very flattering.

CARVE. How many times have you told me you hate flattery?

JANET [*running to him*]. Now he's hurt. Oh, he's hurt. [*Kissing him.*] It's a beautiful picture, and the frame's lovely! And she's so glad he didn't forget.

CARVE. It is pretty good. In fact it's devilish good. It's one of the best things I ever did in my life. Old Carve would have got eight hundred for that like a shot.

JANET [*sceptically*]. Would he! It's wonderful how people are when they're dead.

CARVE. And now will she let him finish reading his paper?

JANET [*handing him the paper, then putting her head close to his and looking at the paper*]. What was it he was reading that made him so deaf he couldn't hear his wife when she spoke to him?

CARVE. This.

JANET [*reading*]. "Ilam Carve's princely bequest. The International Gallery of Art. Foundation stone laying. Eloquent speech by Lord Rosebery." Oh! So they've begun it at last?

CARVE. Yes, they've begun it at last.

JANET. Well, if you ask me, I should have thought he could have found something better to do with his money.

CARVE. As for example?

JANET. Well, I should have thought there were more than enough picture galleries as it is. Who wants 'em? Even when they're free, people won't go into them unless it's a wet day. I've never been in a free picture gallery yet that wasn't as empty as a church. Stands to reason! It isn't even a cinematograph. When I see rows of people in Trafalgar Square waiting to get into the National Gallery, then I shall begin to think it's about time we had some more galleries. If I'd been Ilam Carve —

CARVE. Well, what should you have done, witch?

JANET. I should have left a bit more to you, for one thing.

CARVE. I don't want more. If he'd left me eight hundred a year instead of eighty, I shouldn't be any happier.

That's just what I've learnt since I took lodgings in your delightful wigwam, Jane — money and fame have no connection whatever with happiness.

JANET. Money has, when you haven't got enough.

CARVE. But I have. You won't hear of me paying more than half the household expenses, and you say they're never more than thirty shillings a week. Half thirty — fifteen. Look at the balance it leaves me.

JANET. And supposing I had to ask you to pay more?

CARVE [*in a serious sympathetic tone, startled*]. Anything wrong?

JANET. Well, there's nothing *wrong,* as it were — yet —

CARVE. Jane, I do believe you've been hiding something from me.

JANET [*with difficulty pulls a letter from her pocket*]. No —

CARVE. I've felt it for several days.

JANET. You just haven't then. Because I only got it this morning. Here, you may as well read it. [*Handing him the letter*]. It's about the brewery.

CARVE [*reading*]. "Mrs. Albert Shawn. Sir or Madam." — Why are shareholders never supposed to have any particular sex? — "Sir or Madam. Cohoon's Brewery, Ltd., — I am directed by the shareholders' provisional committee of investigation to request your attendance at an informal meeting of shareholders to be held in room 2009 Winchester House on Friday the 20th inst. at noon. If you cannot be present, will you kindly write stating whether or not you will be prepared to support the committee of investigation at the annual meeting. In view of the probability that the directors' report will be unfavorable, and the ordinary dividend either passed or much reduced, the committee wishes to be thoroughly prepared and armed. Believe me, Sir or Madam." Oh! So that's it, is it?

JANET. Yes. My father said to me before he died, "Keep your money in beer, Janet"; he said, "Beer'll never fail in this country." And there you are!

[*She goes to fireplace, opens coal scuttle, takes out a piece of paper ready placed within, and sticks it on the handle so as to keep her hands from being soiled as she replenishes the fire.*]

CARVE [*lightly*]. Oh, well! We must wait and see what happens.

JANET. Supposing the dividend doesn't happen?

CARVE. I never worry about money.

JANET. But we shall want to eat once or twice pretty nearly every day, I suppose?

CARVE. Personally, I am quite satisfied with a plain but perfect table.

JANET. You needn't tell me what you are satisfied with. You're satisfied with the very best at one shilling and sixpence a pound.

CARVE. I can place eighty pounds per annum at your absolute disposal. That alone will pay for over a thousand best cuts.

JANET. Yes, and what about your clothes and my clothes, and the rates and taxes, and busfares, and holidays, and your cigarettes, and doctor, and errand boys' Christmas-boxes, and gas, and coal, and repairs? Repairs! A *hundred* and eighty is more like what we want.

CARVE. And yet you have several times taken your Bible oath that my half-share of it all came to less than forty pounds.

JANET. Well — er — I was thinking of food.

[*She begins to collect the breakfast things.*]

CARVE. Jane, you have been a deceitful thing. But never mind. I will draw a veil over this sinful past. Let us assume that beer goes all to pieces, and that you never get another cent out of Cohoon's. Well, as you need a hundred and eighty a year, I will give you a hundred and eighty a year.

JANET. And where shall you get the extra hundred?

CARVE. I shall earn it.

JANET. No, you don't. I won't have you taking any more situations.

CARVE. I shall earn it here.

JANET. How?

CARVE. Painting!

JANET [*stopping her work and coming towards him, half-caressing and half-chiding*]. I don't *mind* this painting business. Don't think I object to it in the least. There's a strong smell with it now and then, but it does keep you quiet in the attic while I'm cleaning the house, and that's something. And then going out making sketches you get exercise and fresh air. Being with Ilam Carve so long, I expect you picked up the habit as it were, and I'm sure I don't want you to drop it. I love to see you enjoying yourself. But you don't suppose people'll *buy* these things [*pointing vaguely to picture on chair*], do you? No; there's far too many amateur artists about for *that!*

CARVE. If I wanted, I could take a cab and sell that in Bond Street inside sixty minutes at my own price. Only I don't want.

JANET. Now, just listen to me. You remember that picture you did of Putney Bridge with the saloon entrance of the Reindeer Public House showing in the corner? It was one of the first you did here.

CARVE. Yes, I was looking for it the other day, and I couldn't find it.

JANET. I'm not surprised. Because it's sold.

CARVE. Sold? [*Excited.*] What in the name of—

JANET [*soothing him*]. Now—now! Do you remember you said Ilam Carve would have got £1000 for a thing just like that?

CARVE. So he would. It was absolutely characteristic.

JANET. Well, I said to myself, "He seems mighty sure of himself. Supposing it's me that's wrong?" So one day I quietly took that picture round to Bostock's, the second-hand furniture man, you know,—he was a friend of father's,—and I asked him what he'd give me for it. He wouldn't take it at any price. Not at any price. Then I asked him if he'd keep it in his shop and sell it for me on commission. Well, it stuck in Bostock's shop—in his window and out of his window—for twelve months and more, and then one day the landlord of the Reindeer saw it and he bought it for six shillings, because his public-house was in it. He was half-drunk. Mr. Bostock charged me eighteenpence commission, and I bought you two neckties with the four and six, and I said nothing because I didn't want your feelings to be hurt. And that reminds me, last week but one they took the landlord of the Reindeer off to the lunatic asylum. . . . So, you see!

CARVE [*serious, preoccupied*]. And where's the picture now?

JANET. I shouldn't be surprised if it's in the private bar of the Reindeer.

CARVE. I must get hold of it.

JANET. Albert, you aren't vexed, are you?

CARVE [*forcing himself to adopt a light tone*]. How could I be vexed with two neckties to the good? But don't do it again, Jane. I shall go round to the Reindeer this morning and have a drink. If that picture ever found its way to a Bond Street expert's, the consequences might be awkward—devilish awkward. Because it's dated, you see.

JANET. No, I don't see. I shouldn't have said a word about it, only I wanted to save you from being disappointed later on.

CARVE [*in a new casual tone*]. Just get me my cash-box, will you?

[JANET *at once produces the cash-box from a drawer.*]

JANET. And what now? I'm not broke yet, you great silly.

[*Laughs, but is rather intimidated by* CARVE'S *air.*]

CARVE [*having unlocked box and taken a bag from it*]. You see that? [*He showers gold out of it.*] Well, count it!

JANET. Gracious! Ten—fifteen—eighteen — twenty? — two — four — twenty-six pounds. These your savings?

CARVE. That's what I've earned with painting just at odd times.

JANET. Really? [CARVE *nods.*] You could knock me down with a feather!

CARVE. I'll tell you. You know the frame-maker's next to Salmon and

Gluckstein's. I buy my colors and canvases and things there. They cost money. I owed the chap two pounds once, and one morning, in the shop, when I was opening my box to put some new tubes in, he saw one of my pictures all wet. He offered of his own accord to take it for what I owed him. I wouldn't let him have it. But I was rather hard up, so I said I'd do him another instead, and I did him one in a different style and not half as good, and of course he liked it even better. Since then, I've done him quite a few. It isn't that I've needed the money; but it's a margin, and colors and frames, etc., come to a dickens of a lot in a year.

JANET [*staggered*]. And whatever does he do with them?

CARVE. With the pictures? Don't know. I've never seen one in his window. I haven't been selling him any lately.

JANET. Why?

CARVE. Oh, I didn't feel like it. And the things were getting too good. But, of course, I can start again any time.

JANET [*still staggered*]. Two pounds apiece? [CARVE *nods.*] Would he give you two pounds for that?

[*Pointing to portrait.*]

CARVE. You bet he would.

JANET. Why! Two pounds would keep us for the best part of a week. How long does it take you to do one?

[*Noise of motor car outside.*]

CARVE. Oh, three or four hours. I work pretty quickly.

JANET. Well, it's like a fairy tale. Two pounds! I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels!

[*Violent ringing at front door bell.*]

CARVE. There's one of your tradesmen.

JANET. It isn't. They know better than come to my front door. They know I won't have it.

[*Exit, throwing off apron.*]

[CARVE *examines the portrait of his wife with evident pleasure.*]

CARVE [*to himself*]. That 'ud make 'em sit up in Bond Street.

[*Laughs grimly.*]

[*Voices off. Re-enter* JANET, *followed by* ENAG *carrying a picture.*]

JANET. Well, it never rains but it pours. Here's a gentleman in a motor car wants to know if you've got any pictures for sale.

[*She calmly conceals her apron.*]

ENAG [*with diplomatic caution and much deference*]. Good-morning.

CARVE [*whose entire demeanor has suddenly changed into hostility*]. Good-morning.

ENAG. I've been buying some very delightful little things of yours from a man that calls himself a picture-dealer and frame-maker [*ironically*] in the High Street here. I persuaded him — not without difficulty — to give me your address. And I've ventured to call just to see if by chance you have anything for sale.

CARVE. By chance I haven't!

ENAG. Nothing at all?

CARVE. Not a square inch.

ENAG [*catching sight of* JANET'S *portrait*]. Pardon me. May I look?

JANET. Oh, do!

ENAG. A brilliant likeness.

JANET. Who of?

ENAG. Why, madam — yourself! The attitude is extraordinarily expressive. And if I may say so [*glancing at* CARVE] the placing of the high lights — those white sleevelets — what d'you call them?

JANET. Why! Those are my cooking-sleeves!

ENAG. [*quietly*]. Yes — well — it's genius — mere genius.

JANET [*looking at picture afresh*]. It *is* rather pretty when you come to look at it.

ENAG. It is a masterpiece, madam. [*To* CARVE.] Then I may not make an offer for it?

CARVE. No.

JANET. Excuse me, Albert. Why shouldn't the gentleman make an offer for it?

ENAG [*quickly seizing an opportunity*]. If you cared to consider, say, five hundred pounds.

JANET. Five hundred p—

EBAG. I came down quite prepared to spend — and to pay cash.

[*Fingers his pocket-book.*]

JANET [*sitting down*]. And if it isn't a rude question — do you generally go about with five hundred pounds in your pocket, as it were?

EBAG [*raising his hands*]. In my business, madam —

CARVE. It's not for sale.

[*Turns it round.*]

JANET [*vivaciously*]. Oh yes, it is. *Somebody* in this house must think about the future. [*cajolingly.*] If this gentleman can show me five hundred pounds it's for sale. After all, it's my picture. And you can do me another one. I'd much sooner be done without the cooking-sleeves. [*Entreating.*] Albert!

CARVE [*shy, nervous, and tongue-tied*]. Well!

JANET [*endearingly*]. That's right! That's all right!

EBAG [*putting down notes*]. If you will kindly count these —

JANET [*taking the notes*]. Nay, I'm too dizzy to count them. [*As if giving up any attempt to realize the situation.*] It fairly beats me! I never *did* understand this art business, and I never shall. . . . [*To* EBAG.] Why are you so interested in my portrait? You've never seen me before.

EBAG. Madam, your portrait happens to be one of the very finest modern paintings I ever saw. [*To* CARVE.] I have a picture here as to which I should like to ask your opinion. [*Exposing picture.*] I bought it ten years ago.

CARVE [*after seeing picture*]. Janet, would you mind leaving us a minute.

JANET [*triumphant with her money*]. Not a bit. [*Exit,* L.]

EBAG [*bowing to* JANET. *Then to* CARVE]. It's signed "Ilam Carve." Should you say it's a genuine Carve?

CARVE [*more and more disturbed*]. Yes.

EBAG. Where was it painted?

CARVE. Why do you ask me?

EBAG [*quietly dramatic*]. Because you painted it. [*Pause. He approaches* CARVE.] Master —

CARVE. What's that?

EBAG. Master! [*Pause.*]

CARVE [*impulsively*]. Look here! I never could stick being called "master"! It's worse even than "maître." Have a cigarette? How did you find out who I was?

EBAG [*pointing to Janet's portrait*]. Isn't that proof enough?

CARVE. Yes, but you knew before you saw that.

EBAG [*after lighting cigarette*]. I did. I knew from the very first picture I bought from our friend the "picture-dealer and frame-maker" in the early part of last year.

CARVE. But I'd completely altered my style. I altered it on purpose.

EBAG [*shaking his head*]. My dear sir, there was once a well-known man who stood six feet ten inches high. He shaved off his beard and dyed his hair, and invented a very ingenious costume, and went to a Fancy Dress Ball as Tom Thumb. Strange to say, his disguise was penetrated immediately.

CARVE. Who are you?

EBAG. My name is Ebag — New Bond Street.

CARVE. What! You're my old dealer!

EBAG. And I'm delighted at last to make your acquaintance, sir. It wasn't until I'd bought several of those small canvases from the Putney man that I began to inquire closely into their origin. As a general rule it's a mistake for a dealer to be too curious. But my curiosity got the better of me. And when I found out that the pictures were being produced week by week, fresh, then I knew I was on the edge of some mystery.

CARVE [*awkwardly*]. The fact is, perhaps, I ought to explain.

EBAG. Pardon me. I ask nothing. It isn't my affair. I felt certain, solely from the evidence of what I was buying, that the great painter who was supposed to be buried in Westminster Abbey, and whose somewhat premature funeral I attended, must be alive and painting vigorously. I wanted the assurance from your lips. I have it. The rest does not concern me — at any rate, for the moment.

CARVE. I'll say this — you know a picture when you see it.

EBAG [*proudly*]. I am an expert, nothing else.

CARVE. All right! Well, I'll only ask you to persevere in your discretion. As you say, it isn't your affair. Thank goodness, I didn't put a date on any of these things. I won't sell any more. I'd take an oath never to paint again, only I know I should go and break it next week. I shall rely on this famous discretion of yours to say nothing — nothing whatever.

EBAG. I'm afraid it's too late.

CARVE. How too late?

EBAG. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to state publicly that you are Ilam Carve, and that there must have been — er — some misapprehension, somewhere, over that funeral.

CARVE [*aghast*]. Publicly? Why?

EBAG. It's like this, I've been selling those pictures to Texel in New York. You remember, he's always been one of your principal collectors. He's getting old, and he's half-blind, but he still buys. Now, I rely on my judgment, and I guaranteed those pictures to be genuine Carves. Well, somebody over there must have had suspicions.

CARVE. What does that matter? There isn't a date on any of them.

EBAG. Just so. But in one of those pictures there's most distinctly a taxi-cab. It isn't a private motor car. It's a taxi.

CARVE. And if there is? No law against painting a taxi, I hope!

EBAG [*again quietly dramatic*]. No. But at the date of your funeral there wasn't a single taxi on the streets of London.

CARVE. The devil!

EBAG. Exactly. Texel is bringing an action against me for misrepresentation. I shall have to ask you to give evidence and say who you are.

CARVE [*angrily*]. But I won't give evidence! You've brought this on yourself. How much did you sell those little pictures for?

EBAG. Oh, an average of between four and five hundred.

CARVE. And what did you pay for them? I ask you, what did you pay for them?

EBAG [*smoothly*]. Four pounds a piece. The fact is — I did rather well out of them.

CARVE. Damned Jew!

EBAG [*smoothly*]. Damned — possibly. Jew — most decidedly. But in this particular instance I behaved just like a Christian. I paid a little less than I was asked, and sold for the highest I could get. I am perfectly innocent, and my reputation is at stake.

CARVE. I don't care.

EBAG. But I do. It's the reputation of the greatest expert in Europe. And I shall have to insist on you going into the witness-box.

CARVE [*horrified*]. Me in the witness-box! Me cross-examined! No. That's always been my nightmare!

EBAG. Nevertheless —

CARVE. Please go. [*Commandingly.*] Please go.

[EBAG, *intimidated by* CARVE'S *demeanor, picks up his pictures to depart.*]

EBAG [*at door*]. Your wife will perhaps be good enough to post me a receipt for that trifle. [*Very respectfully.*] Good-morning. [*Exit,* R.]

[CARVE *goes to door,* L., *and opens it.* JANET *is standing behind it.*]

(*Enter* JANET.)

CARVE. You've been listening?

JANET [*counting her banknotes*]. Well, naturally!

[*Putting notes in her purse.*]

CARVE. Here's a perfect Hades of a mess.

JANET. And it all comes of this painting. Art as it's called.

[*She finds her apron and puts it on.*]

CARVE [*with an air of discovery*]. Your faculty for keeping calm really is most singular.

JANET. Somebody has to keep calm.

[*Voice off:* "Butcher."]

CARVE. Anybody would say you didn't care a cent whether I'm Ilam Carve or whether I'm somebody else.

JANET. What does it matter to me who

you are, so long as you're *you?* Men are so unpractical. You can be the Shah of Persia if you like — I don't mind.

CARVE. But aren't you convinced now?

[*Voice off:* "Butcher."]

JANET [*with an enigmatic smile at* CARVE]. Coming! Coming!

[*Exit.*]

[*The stage is darkened to indicate the passage of several months.*]

SCENE 2

TIME.—*Before daylight on a morning in February. Fire burning in grate. Also a speck of gas. Otherwise it is dark.*

[CARVE *is discovered reposing in an easy-chair. Enter* JANET *with a candle.*]

JANET [*stiffly*]. So *you've* not been to sleep either?

CARVE [*stiffly*]. Oh yes; had an excellent night in this chair.

JANET [*going to fire*]. Now, you're only boasting. If you've had such an excellent night [*imitating him*], who's kept up such an excellent fire?

CARVE [*lamely*]. Well, of course I looked after it now and then. I didn't want to perish in my solitude.

JANET. Then why didn't you come to bed, great baby?

CARVE [*sitting up with solemnity*]. Janet, we are a pair of great babies to have quarrelled like that, — especially at bedtime.

JANET [*simply*]. Quarrelled?

CARVE. Well, didn't we?

JANET. *I* didn't. I agreed with everything you said.

CARVE. What did you agree with? I should like to know.

JANET. You said I didn't really believe after all that you are Ilam Carve, and I assured you in the most soothing manner that I did believe you are Ilam Carve!

CARVE. And do you call that agreeing with me? I know perfectly well from your tone that in spite of all my explanations and reiterations during the last three months you *don't* believe I'm Ilam Carve. You only say you do in order to soothe me. I hate being soothed. You're as convinced as ever that Ebag is a rascal, and that I've got a bee in my bonnet.

JANET. But what does it matter?

CARVE [*cold and hard*]. Well, I like that!

JANET [*weeping*]. It's not my fault if I don't believe you're Ilam Carve. I would if I could, but I can't! You're very cruel.

CARVE [*jumping up and embracing her*]. Hush, hush! There! [*Cajolingly.*] Who's being an infant now?

JANET. I don't pretend to understand this art.

CARVE. I hope you never will. One of the chief charms of existence in your wigwam, my child, is that I never hear any confounded chatter about art. Now — are we pals?

JANET [*smiling reconciliation*]. Darling, do turn the gas up.

CARVE [*obeying, struck by her attire*]. Why — what are you dressed like that for?

JANET. I was thinking of going away.

[*Exit,* L.]

[*She re-enters immediately with kettle and puts it on fire.*]

CARVE. Going away?

JANET [*smiling*]. Now do listen, darling. Let's go away. We can't stop here. This Ebag case is getting more and more on your nerves, and on mine too. I'm sure that's what's the matter with us. What it'll be next week when the trial comes on, I don't know — upon my soul I don't. It's all very well for you to refuse to see callers and never go out. But I can tell you one thing — we shall have those newspaper people on the roof in a day or two, and looking down the chimney to see how I lay the fire. Lawyers are nothing to them. Do you know — no you don't, because I didn't want you to be upset — last night's milk was brought by a journalist — with a camera. They're beginning to bribe the tradesmen. I

tremble to think what *will* be in this morning's papers.

CARVE [*trying to make light of it*]. Oh, nothing will upset me now. But you might let me know at once if the editor of the *Spectator* calls round with the bread.

JANET. And I'll tell you another thing. That Mr. Horning — you know the breathless man on the *Evening Courier* that came to the Grand Babylon — he's taken lodgings opposite — arrived last night.

CARVE. Oh, for a machine gun — one simple little machine gun!

[*Exit* JANET, L.]

[*She immediately returns with a tray containing bread, etc., and a toasting-fork.*]

JANET. So I thought if we just vanished —

CARVE. It's too late — I've had the subpœna. If I hooked it, everybody would say I was an adventurer.

JANET. We could come back for the trial.

CARVE. We should be followed.

JANET. Not if we start now.

CARVE. Now?

JANET. Yes, *now!* The back door. Before it gets light.

CARVE. Creep away in the dark! No! I'll go through with the thing.

JANET. Well, I shall travel alone, then. Here's my bunch of keys. I'll just explain to you where everything is. I daresay Mrs. Simpson will come in and clean up. She's not bad, as charwomen go.

CARVE. Jane!

JANET. Well!

CARVE. You're taking an unfair advantage of me.

JANET [*putting tea leaves in teapot*]. What if I am?

CARVE. You're only a woman after all. . . . And I'd thought so highly of you!

JANET [*sweetly*]. Then you'll come. Better brush yourself up first.

CARVE. What time is it?

JANET [*looking at clock*]. Seven o'clock.

CARVE. Where do you mean to drag me to?

JANET. Well, what about this Continent of yours that I've heard so much of?

CARVE. There's a train from Victoria at 8:30.

JANET. Very well then. We'll have another breakfast at Victoria.

CARVE. And the cab?

JANET. There isn't going to be any cab — *nor* luggage — rousing the whole street! [CARVE *goes to window.*] For goodness' sake don't draw those curtains — with the gas flaring up!

CARVE. Why not?

JANET [*conspiratorial*]. Supposing there's some journalist on the watch outside!

CARVE. I wanted to look at the weather.

JANET. Well, go to the front door, and mind you open it quietly.

[*Exit* CARVE, R.]

[JANET *pours water on tea.*]

[*Exit,* L.]

[*Re-enter* CARVE *quickly.*]

CARVE. I say, here's a curate pushed himself in at the front door!

[*Re-enter* JANET, L.]

JANET. No, he's come in at the back.

CARVE. But I tell you he's *here!*

[*Enter* JAMES SHAWN, L. *Then enter* JOHN SHAWN, R. *Pause.*]

JAMES. Now let me entreat everybody to remain perfectly calm.

JANET. Oh, don't worry about that. Nothing startles us now. A few curates more or less. . . .

CARVE [*sinking into chair*]. I suppose this is the very newest journalism. Would you mind me asking a question?

JAMES. What is it?

[JANET *makes the tea.*]

CARVE. Why did you wait till the door was opened? Seems a pity to stand on ceremony. Why not have broken a window or so and climbed right in?

JAMES. John, is mother there?

JOHN [*at door,* R.] Mother, how

often shall I have to ask you to keep close to me?

[*Enter* MRS. SHAWN, R.]

MRS. S. I'm all of a tremble.

JOHN [*firmly*]. Come now, you mustn't give way. This is he [*pointing to* CARVE]. Do you recognize him as our father?

[JANET, *who is cutting a slice of bread, stops and looks from one to the other.*]

MRS. S. [*To* CARVE]. Albert, don't you know me? To think that next Tuesday it'll be six and twenty years since you walked out o' the house casual like and — and —

[*Stops from emotion.*]

CARVE. Go on. Go on. . . . To think that I was once shy!

JANET [*to* MRS. SHAWN]. Here, you'd better come and sit a bit nearer the fire. [*Very kindly.*] Come along now!

MRS. S. [*obeying*]. Thank you, m'm.

JANET [*to* JOHN]. And which of you boys was it that had the idea of keeping a middle-aged woman perishing on a doorstep before daylight in February?

JOHN. How else could we —

JAMES [*interrupting him*]. Excuse me, John.

JOHN [*subsiding*]. I beg your pardon, James.

JAMES [*to* JANET]. All questions should be addressed to me. My brother John is here solely to take charge of our mother. We have done our best, by careful forethought, to ensure that this painful interview shall be as brief and as dignified as possible.

JANET. And couldn't you think of anything cleverer than to give your poor mother her death of cold for a start?

JAMES. How else could we have arranged it? I myself rang at your door for a quarter of an hour yesterday afternoon.

JANET. We never heard you.

JAMES. Strange!

JANET. No, it isn't. We took the bell off three days ago.

JAMES. I was told that it was impossible to effect an entrance in the ordinary way. Hence, we had to use craft. I argued that food must come into the house, and that it probably came in early.

JANET. Well, it's a good thing for you I happened to hear the cat mewing, or you might have had another couple of hours in my back yard. You're the eldest, I suppose.

JAMES. We are twins.

JANET. Really!

CARVE. As you say — really!

JAMES. I am the older, but the difference between us is not considerable.

JOHN. Now, mother, please don't cry.

JANET [*having poured out a cup of tea, holds it before* MRS. SHAWN]. Sugar? [MRS. SHAWN *signifies an affirmative* — JANET *drops sugar into cup, which* MRS. SHAWN *takes.*] You'll drink it easier if you lift your veil.

JAMES. Now, mother — you are sure you recognize this gentleman?

MRS. S. [*not very positively*]. Yes — yes. It's a rare long while . . .

JAMES. He is your husband and our father?

MRS. S. [*more positively*]. Yes. And sorry I am to say it.

[JANET *eyes her carefully.*]

JAMES. I think that suffices. [*To* JANET.] Madam, you are in a most unfortunate position. You supposed yourself to be a married woman, whereas you are nothing of the kind. I needn't say that as the victim of a heartless bigamist you have our deepest . . .

JANET [*handing him a slice of bread on toasting-fork*]. Just toast this for your mother, will you, and mind the bars. I'll get another cup or two.

[*Goes to sideboard and gets crockery.*]

CARVE. And so these are my two sons! They show little emotion in beholding the author of their being for the first time. As for me, I hardly recognize them.

MRS. S. And is it likely, seeing they were born six months after you deserted me, Albert?

CARVE. I see. If it isn't indiscreet, am I a grandfather?

JAMES [*toasting*]. No, sir.

CARVE. I only wanted to know the

worst. Silly joke about the fertility of curates — you've met with it, no doubt!

JAMES. Your tone is simply lamentable, sir.

JANET [*to* JAMES]. Mind! You can do the other side. Now, take care; the fire's very hot. [*In the same mild tone to* MRS. SHAWN.] Twenty-six years, you say?

MRS. S. Yes. Albert was twenty-two then, weren't you, Albert?

CARVE. Undoubtedly.

JANET. And how did you come to find us out at last?

MRS. S. It was through an advertisement put in the paper by that Mr. Texel — him that's in this law case — offering a reward for information about a Mr. Albert Shawn who'd been valet to that artist man that died.

JANET. Oh! So Mr. Texel has been advertising, has he?

[*Giving a cup of tea to* JOHN SHAWN.]

MRS. S. Yes, anybody that knew Albert Shawn when he was young. "Albert Shawn," I says, "that's my husband's name." I'd been told he'd gone off in service with a painter or something of that kind. I married him as a valet.

JANET [*pouring out tea*]. A valet?

MRS. S. A valet, ma'am. . . . And the struggle I've had to bring up my children. [*Whimpering.*]

JAMES. Now, mother!

JANET [*stopping* JAMES]. That will do now! Give it to me. [*Taking toast and fork.*] Here's some tea. Now don't pretend you've never seen a cup of tea before — you a curate!

[JAMES *accepts tea.*]

MRS. S. Yes, they *would* go into the church, both of them! I don't know how we've managed it, but managed it we have, surplices and all. And very happy they were, I'm sure. And now there's this dreadful scandal. Oh, Albert, you might at least have changed your name! I — I —

[*Partially breaks down.*]

JOHN. Mother, I beg — [MRS. SHAWN *breaks down entirely.*] Mother, I absolutely insist. You know you promised not to speak at all except in answer to questions.

JAMES. I think, mother, you really might try —

JOHN. Leave her to me! Now, mother!

[*Loud double knock off.*]

JANET [*to* JOHN SHAWN]. There's the post! Just go and bring me the letters in, will you? [JOHN *hesitates.*] You'll find them scattered about the floor in the hall. Don't miss any.

[*Exit* JOHN SHAWN, R.]

[MRS. SHAWN *recovers.*]

JAMES. And what do you propose to do, madam?

JANET [*who has been soothing* MRS. SHAWN]. Me? What about?

JAMES. About this — this bigamy.

JANET. Oh, nothing. What are you thinking of doing?

[*Re-enter* JOHN SHAWN *with post, which* CARVE *takes and begins to read.*]

JAMES. Well, I suppose you're aware that bigamy is a criminal offence?

JANET. There's a police-station in the Upper Richmond Road. Better call there. It'll be so nice for you two, when you're flourishing about in the pulpit, to think of your father in prison — won't it now?

JAMES. We, of course, should not prosecute. If you are prepared to go on living with this gentleman as though nothing had happened —

JANET. Oh, I don't mind.

JAMES. Well, then, I doubt if we should interfere. But Mr. Texel's lawyers are already in communication with the police.

JANET [*stiffly*]. I see. [*An awkward pause during which everybody except* CARVE, *who is reading his post, looks at everybody else*]. Well, then, I think that's about all, isn't it? [*A shorter pause.*] Good-morning. [*She bows to the curates, and shakes hand with* MRS. SHAWN.] [*To* MRS. SHAWN.] Now do take care of yourself.

MRS. S. [*weakly*]. Thank you.

JOHN. Good-morning. Mother, take my arm, please.

JAMES. Good-morning.

JANET. Albert, they're going.

CARVE [*looking up absently and only half rising, perfunctorily and quickly*]. Good-morning. Good-morning. [*Sits down.*]

JANET [*to* JAMES SHAWN, *who is hovering near door L, uncertain of his way out*]. *This* way, *this* time!

[*Exeunt the* SHAWNS *followed by* JANET.]

CARVE *rises and draws curtains of window apart.*]

[*Re-enter* JANET.]

JANET [*cheerfully*]. Oh, it's quite light! [*Turns out gas.*]

CARVE [*gazing at her*]. Incomparable woman!

JANET. So it's true after all!

CARVE. What?

JANET. All that rigmarole about you being Ilam Carve?

CARVE. You're beginning to come round at last?

JANET. Well, I think they were quite honest people — those three. There's no doubt the poor creature once had a husband who *did* run off. And it seems fairly clear his name was Albert Shawn, and he went away as valet to an artist. But then, on the other hand, if there is one thing certain in this world, it is that you were never married before you married me. That I *will* swear to.

CARVE. And yet she identified me. She was positive.

JANET. Positive? That's just what she wasn't! And didn't you notice the queer way she looked at you as they went out? As much as to say, "I wonder now whether it *is* him — after all?"

CARVE. Then you really think she could be mistaken on such a point?

JANET. Pooh! After twenty-six years. Besides, all men of forty-seven look more or less alike. . . . And so I'm the wife of Ilam Carve that's supposed to be buried in Westminster Abbey and royalty went to his funeral! We'll have some tea ourselves. I say, why did you do it? [*Pours out tea.*]

CARVE [*casually*]. I don't know. It was to save worry to begin with, and then it went on by itself and somehow I couldn't stop it. . . . I don't know!

JANET [*endearingly*]. Well, I've always told you frankly you've got a bee in your bonnet. [*Drinking tea and turning over the post.*] More letters from these newspaper people! What's this lovely crest on this envelope?

CARVE. It's from Lord Leonard Alcar. He says if we'll go up and see him tomorrow afternoon he'll be very much obliged indeed, and he may be able to be of assistance to us.

JANET [*deeply impressed*]. Lord Leonard Al . . . Where's the letter? [*Searches for it hurriedly. As she reads it.*] Well I never! [*Reading*] "And Mrs. Shawn." I've got nothing to go in.

CARVE. Oh, I sha'n't go!

JANET. Why not?

CARVE. Well, what about this trip to the Continent?

JANET. Continent fiddlesticks. I've never been asked to go and see a Lord before. . . .

CARVE. Now listen, Jane. What earthly good can it do? I sha'n't go.

JANET. I shall. So there! Six Dukes in the family! I wouldn't miss it for anything.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE I.—LORD LEONARD ALCAR'S *study, Grosvenor Gardens. Door, back center. Door,* L. JANET'S *portrait is conspicuous on a wall.*

TIME.—*The next afternoon.*

[LORD LEONARD ALCAR *and* MR. TEXEL *are coming into the room from door at back.*]

ALCAR. You still go on collecting, Mr. Texel?

TEXEL [*uncertain of his steps*]. Well, yes. I've been amusing myself with pictures for pretty nigh forty years. Why should I deprive myself of this

pleasure merely because my eyesight's gone?

ALCAR. Why, indeed! You have the true collecting spirit. Permit me [*directs* TEXEL'S *hand to chair*].

TEXEL. Thanks, I'm on to it. [*Sitting down.*] My sight's going steadily worse, but there are still a few things that I can make out pretty clearly, Lord Leonard. Motor omnibuses, cathedrals, English easy-chairs. . . .

ALCAR. Well, I'm charmed to find you in such good spirits, and really I feel very grateful to you for accepting my invitation.

TEXEL. Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir. Two old collectors like us — rivals at Christie's. I wonder how many times I've cabled over instructions to my agent to smash you at any cost. Delighted to meet you, Lord Leonard.

ALCAR. We ought to have met earlier, Mr. Texel. Now I've got you here, I must tell you I've ventured to invite one or two — er — kindred spirits to meet you.

[*Enter* SERVANT.]

SERVANT. Mr. Ebag.

[*Enter* EBAG.]

[*Exit* SERVANT.]

ALCAR. How d'you do, Ebag?

EBAG. My lord.

ALCAR. Let me introduce you to Mr. Texel. Mr. Texel, this is Mr. Ebag.

TEXEL [*surprised — aside to* LORD LEONARD ALCAR]. This one of your kindred spirits?

EBAG [*also surprised*]. Mr. Texel!

TEXEL [*holding out his hand towards* EBAG, *who takes it*]. Well, Mr. Ebag, I've made a special journey to Europe to get a verdict from an English court that you've done me up for about thirty thousand dollars, and if I get it I'll do my level best afterwards to see you safe into prison; but in the meantime I'm very glad to meet you. I feel sure you're one of the right sort, whatever you are.

EBAG. You flatter me, Mr. Texel. The gladness is mutual.

[*Enter* SERVANT.]

SERVANT. Mr. Cyrus Carve. Mr. and Mrs. X.

[*Enter* JANET. *She hesitates in doorway.* LORD LEONARD ALCAR *goes to meet her.*]

JANET. You Lord Alcar?

ALCAR. I am Lord Leonard Alcar.

JANET. My mistake! [*They shake hands.*] But why does this young man call me Mrs. X? I told him *Carve*, plain enough.

ALCAR. Did he? A slip — a slip! You've brought your husband?

JANET. Yes, but not so easily as all that. I'm afraid he's quarrelling out there with Mr. Cyrus Carve. They get across one another on the stairs.

ALCAR. Tut-tut. Excuse me one moment.

[*Exit hurriedly.*]

[*Exit* SERVANT.]

JANET. Mr. Ebag! So you're here too! Why, it's a family party.

EBAG [*astounded*]. How do you do, Mrs. Shawn? I beg pardon, Mrs. Carve.

JANET. It seems I'm Mrs. X now — didn't you hear?

EBAG. I expect the servant had received instructions. His lordship has a great reputation for wit, you know.

JANET [*looking round*]. And what's this room supposed to be?

EBAG. Oh, the study, probably.

JANET. Really! Not what you'd call 'homely,' is it? Rather like being on the stage.

[*Enter* LORD LEONARD ALCAR, *leading* CARVE *on his right and* CYRUS *on his left.* SERVANT *closes door from without.*]

ALCAR. Now we're all safely here, and I fancy there will be enough easy-chairs to go round. Mr. Texel, you already know Mr. Cyrus Carve, and you will be pleased to meet the talented artist who painted the pictures which you have been buying from Mr. Ebag. He has most kindly consented to be called Mr. X for the moment. This is Mrs. X, Mr. Texel.

[*They bow*—CYRUS *shakes hands with* TEXEL.]

EBAG [*to* CYRUS]. How d'you do?

CYRUS. How d'you do?

CARVE. How d'you do?

ALCAR [*observing that these three are already acquainted*]. Good! Excellent! Now, Mrs.—er—X, will you have this chair near the fire?

[*Fixes chair for her.*]

TEXEL [*indicating* JANET, *aside to* EBAG]. Good looking?

EBAG [*aside to* TEXEL]. Very agreeable little thing!

TEXEL. Excellent! Excellent!

ALCAR [*interrupting a gesture from* CARVE]. You have all done me a signal favor by coming here. In thanking you, I wonder if I may ask another favor? May I?

TEXEL. Certainly. Among kindred spirits.

EBAG. Assuredly, my lord.

ALCAR. I would merely request you to control so far as possible any expression of your astonishment at meeting one another here. That is to say, any violent expression.

CARVE [*gaily and carelessly*]. Oh, very well! Very well!

[LORD LEONARD ALCAR *waves the rest of the company into chairs, tactfully separating* CYRUS *and* CARVE *as much as possible. He remains standing himself.*]

JANET. I suppose what you really want is to stop this funny trial from coming on.

ALCAR [*slightly taken aback*]. Mrs. X, I congratulate myself on your presence here. Yes, my ambition is to be peacemaker. Of course a peacemaker always runs the risk of a broken head, but I shall entrust my head to your good nature. As a proof that I really mean business, I need only point out that I haven't invited a single lawyer.

EBAG [*after slight pause*]. This is exceedingly good of your lordship.

TEXEL. For myself I'm rather looking forward to next week. I've spared no expense to get up a first-class show. Half the papers in New York and Chicago are sending over special correspondents. I've even secured your champion humorous judge; and altogether I reckon this trial will be about the greatest judicial proposition the British public's seen in years. Still, I'm always ready to oblige—and I'll shake hands right now, on terms—my terms.

ALCAR. We are making progress.

TEXEL. But what I don't understand is—where *you* come in, Lord Leonard.

ALCAR. Where I come in?

TEXEL. Well, I don't want to be personal, but is this Hague Conference merely your hobby, or are you standing in with somebody?

ALCAR. I quite appreciate your delicacy. Let me assure you that, though it gives me the greatest pleasure to see you all, I have not selected you as the victims of a hobby. Nor have I anything whatever to gain by stopping the trial. The reverse. At this trial I should probably have a seat on the bench next to a delightful actress, and I should enjoy the case very much indeed. I have no doubt that even now the learned judge is strenuously preparing his inimitable flashes of humor, and that, like the rest of the world, I should allow myself to be convulsed by them. I like to think of four K.C.'s toiling hard for a miserable hundred guineas a day each. I like to think of the solicitors, good, honest fellows, striving their best to keep the costs as low as possible. I even like to think of the jury with their powerful intellects who, when we are dead and gone, Mr. Texel, will tell their grandchildren proudly how they decided the famous case of Texel *v.* Ebag. Above all, I like to think of the witnesses revelling in their cross-examination. Nobody will be more sorry than I to miss this grand spectacle of the greatest possible number of the greatest possible brains employed for the greatest possible length of time in settling a question that an average grocer's assistant could settle in five minutes. I am human. *But,* I have been approached—I have been flattered by the suggestion—that I might persuade you two gentlemen to abandon the trial, and I may whisper to

you that the abandonment of the trial would afford satisfaction in — er — influential quarters.

TEXEL. Then are we up against the British Government? Well, go ahead.

ALCAR [*protesting with a very courteous air of extreme astonishment*]. My dear Mr. Texel, how can I have been so clumsy as to convey such an idea? The Government? Not in the least — not in the *least*. On behalf of nobody whatever. [*Confidentially.*] I am merely in a position to inform you positively that an amicable settlement of the case would be viewed with satisfaction in influential quarters.

JANET. Well, I can tell you it would be viewed with satisfaction in a certain street in Putney. But influential quarters — what's it got to do with them?

ALCAR. I shall be quite frank with you. The dignity of Westminster Abbey is involved in this case, and nothing in all England is more sacred to us than Westminster Abbey. One has only to pronounce the word "the Abbey" — to realize that. We know what a modern trial is; we know what the modern press is; and, unhappily, we know what the modern bench is. It is impossible to contemplate with equanimity the prospect of Westminster Abbey and its solemnities being given up to the tender mercy of the evening papers and a joking judge surrounded by millinery. Such an exhibition would be unseemly. It would soil our national existence. In a word, it would have a bad effect.

CARVE [*meditatively — bland*]. How English!

[*He gets up and walks unobtrusively about the room, examining the pictures.*]

ALCAR. Undoubtedly. But this is England. It is perhaps a disadvantage that we are not in Russia nor in Prussia. But we must make the best of our miserable country. [*In a new tone, showing the orator skilled in changes of voice.*] Can't we discuss our little affair in a friendly way entirely without prejudice? We are together here, among gentlemen —

JANET. I'm afraid you're forgetting me.

ALCAR [*recovering himself*]. Madam, I am convinced that none of us can be more gentlemanly than yourself. . . . Can we not find a way of settlement? [*With luxurious enjoyment of the idea.*] Imagine the fury of all those lawyers and journalists when they learn that we — er — if I may so express it — have done them in the eye!

TEXEL. If I wasn't going to come out on top, I could understand you worrying about your old Abbey. But I'm taking the part of your Abbey. When I win *it* wins, and I'm certain to win.

ALCAR. I do not doubt —

EBAG [*with suave assurance*]. But I do.

ALCAR [*continuing*]. I do not doubt your conviction, Mr. Texel. It merely proves that you have never seen a British Jury exercising itself upon a question relating to the fine arts. If you had you would not be certain, for you would know that twelve tradesmen so occupied are capable of accomplishing the most incredible marvels. Supposing you don't win — supposing Mr. Ebag wins —

EBAG. As I assuredly shall.

ALCAR. Then we should have the whole world saying, "Well, they haven't given a national funeral to a really great artist for about a century, and when at last they do try they only succeed in burying a valet."

CARVE [*looking round casually*]. England all over!

ALCAR. The effect would be lamentable — utterly lamentable. You will realize that in influential quarters —

TEXEL. But do you reckon this policy of hushing up things ever does any good?

ALCAR. My dear sir, it is the cornerstone of England's greatness. It is the policy that has made her what she is!

CARVE [*looking round again*]. True! What she *is!*

ALCAR [*turning sharply to* CARVE *behind him*]. Mr. X, your interest in my picture flatters me immensely —

CARVE [*interrupting him*]. I see

you've bought my latest portrait of my wife.

ALCAR. Yes.

JANET [*starting up*]. What's that? [*She goes to inspect picture.*]

CARVE. I suppose it would be abusing your hospitality to inquire how much you paid our excellent dealer for it?

ALCAR. Not in the least. But the fact is we haven't yet settled the price. The exact price is to depend on the result of our gathering.

JANET. Well, if anybody had told me I should find my own portrait — cooking-sleeves and all —

[*Inarticulate — she returns to her chair.*]

ALCAR. And now that we have got so far, Mr. X, I should like to centralize the attention of this quite friendly gathering on yourself.

CARVE [*approaching airily*]. Really! [*He sits.*]

ALCAR. There are several questions we might discuss. For example, we might argue the artistic value of the pictures admittedly the work of Mr. X. That would probably occupy us for about ten years. Or we might ask ourselves how it happened that that exceedingly astute dealer, Mr. Ebag, came to sell as a genuine Ilam Carve, without offering any explanation, a picture which, on the face of it, was painted some time after that great painter had received a national funeral in Westminster Abbey.

EBAG. Sheer carelessness, my lord.

ALCAR. Or we might ask ourselves why a valet should try to pass himself off as a world-renowned artist. Or, on the other hand, why a world-renowned artist should pass himself off as a valet.

CARVE. Sheer carelessness, my lord.

ALCAR. But these details of psychology are beside the main point. And the main point is [*to* CARVE] — Are you Ilam Carve or are you Albert Shawn? [*To the others.*] Surely with a little good will and unembarrassed by the assistance of experts, lawyers, and wigs generally, we can settle that! And once it is settled the need for a trial ceases. [CARVE *assumes an elaborately uninterested air.*] The main point does not seem to interest you, Mr. X.

CARVE [*seeming to start*]. I beg your pardon. No, not profoundly. Why should it?

ALCAR. Yet you claim —

CARVE. Excuse me. I claim nothing except to be let alone. Certainly I do not ask to be accepted as Ilam Carve. I was leading a placid and agreeable existence in a place called Putney, an ideal existence with a pearl among women, when my tranquillity was disturbed and my life transformed into a perfect nightmare by a quarrel between a retail tradesman [*indicating* EBAG] and a wholesale ink-dealer [*indicating* TEXEL] about one of my pictures. It does not concern me. My rôle is and will be passive. If I am forced into the witness-box I shall answer questions to the worst of my ability, and I shall do no more. I am not cross. I am not sulking; but I consider that I have a grievance. If I am here, it is solely because my wife does what she likes with me.

TEXEL. Bravo! This is as good as the trial.

ALCAR [*good-humoredly*]. Will you answer questions here?

CARVE [*good-humoredly*]. It depends.

ALCAR. Do you assert that you are Ilam Carve?

CARVE. I assert nothing.

ALCAR. *Are* you Ilam Carve?

CARVE. Yes, but I don't want to be.

ALCAR. Might I inquire why you allowed your servant to be buried in your name?

CARVE. Well, he always did everything for me — a most useful man. . . . But I didn't 'allow' him to be buried in my name. On the contrary, I told various people that I was not dead — but strange to say, nobody would believe me. My handsome, fascinating cousin here wouldn't even let me begin to tell him. Even my wife wouldn't believe me, so I gave it up.

[TEXEL *does not conceal his enjoyment of the scene.*]

CYRUS [*grimly*]. Which wife?

[CARVE *twiddles his thumbs.*]

ALCAR. But do you mean —

TEXEL. May I interrupt, Lord Leonard? I could listen for hours to this absolutely stupendous gentleman. A circus is nothing to it. But aren't we jumping the track? I've got two witnesses. Mr. Cyrus Carve will swear that your Mr. X is *not* his cousin. And the original Mrs. Albert Shawn will swear that he *is* her husband. That's my case. How is my esteemed opponent going to answer it?

EBAG. In the first place, have you cross-examined this very original Mrs. Albert Shawn?

TEXEL. Come. You don't mean to argue that a woman could mistake another man for her own husband — even after twenty-five years or so?

EBAG [*smiling apologetically for his freedom*]. According to the divorce reports, they're constantly doing it after one year, to say nothing of twenty-five.

TEXEL [*appreciative*]. Good! That's good! Well, I may tell you right here that I had an interview with this gentleman's [*indicating* CARVE] ecclesiastical twins only yesterday afternoon, and they assure me that their mother is positive on the point.

JANET [*meditatively*]. Simpletons!

ALCAR. I beg pardon.

JANET. I daresay they preach very nicely, but out of the pulpit they don't what I should call shine, poor boys! Anybody could see she wasn't positive. Why, it wasn't until the old lady dropped in to have a cup of tea with us that I felt sure my husband's name really *was* Carve.

ALCAR. Then you hadn't credited his story before?

JANET. Well, it wanted some crediting, didn't it?

CYRUS [*with intention*]. You only began to credit it after Mr. Ebag had called and paid you the sum of £500 in cash.

JANET [*after a slight pause, calmly*]. Oh! So you know about that, do you?

CARVE [*to* CYRUS, *genially*]. Cousin, if you continue in that strain I shall have to take you out on to the doormat and assault you.

EBAG. I should like to say —

CYRUS [*interrupting grimly*]. Lord Leonard, isn't it time that this ceased?

TEXEL [*heartily amused*]. But why? I'm enjoying every minute of it.

ALCAR. I should be sorry to interfere with Mr. Texel's amusement, but I think the moment has now come for me to make a disclosure. When I was approached as to this affair I consulted Mr. Cyrus Carve first, he being the sole surviving relative of his cousin. That seemed to me to be the natural and proper course to adopt. Mr. Cyrus Carve gave me a very important piece of information, and it is solely on the strength of that information that I have invited you all to come here this afternoon. [*He looks at* CYRUS.]

CYRUS [*clearing his throat, to* EBAG *and* CARVE]. Of course, you'll argue that after thirty-five years absence it's a wise man that can recognize his own cousin. I'm absolutely convinced in my own mind that you [*scornfully to* CARVE] are not my cousin. But then, you'll tell me that men have been hung before now on the strength of sworn identification that proved afterwards to be mistaken. I admit it. I admit that in theory I may be wrong. [*With increased grim sarcasm.*] I admit that in theory the original Mrs. Shawn may be wrong. Everything's possible, especially with a bully of a K.C. cross-examining you, and a judge turning you into 'copy' for *Punch*. But I've got something up my sleeve that will settle the whole affair instantly, to the absolute satisfaction of both plaintiff and defendant.

CARVE. My dear fellow, why not have told us this exciting news earlier?

CYRUS. Why not? [*Glowering at* CARVE.] Because I wanted you to commit yourself completely beyond any withdrawing. I decided what sort of man you were the moment I first set eyes on you, and when I heard of this law case, I said to myself that I'd come forward as a witness, but I shouldn't give any evidence away in advance. I said to myself I'd show you up once and for all in full court. However, his lordship prevailed on me.

CARVE. Well?

CYRUS. When my cousin and I were boys I've seen him with his shirt off.

CARVE. True. And he's seen you with *yours* off.

CYRUS. Now just here [*pointing to left front neck below collar*], just below his collar, my cousin Ilam Carve had two moles close together — one was hairy and the other wasn't. My cousin was very proud of them.

CARVE. Oh!

CYRUS [*ferociously sarcastic*]. I suppose you'll say you've had them removed?

CARVE [*casually*]. No. Not precisely.

CYRUS. Can you show them?

CARVE [*very casually*]. Of course.

TEXEL [*slapping his knee*]. Great! Great!

CYRUS [*staggered but obstinate*]. Well, let's have a look at them.

ALCAR [*to* JANET]. Then doubtless you are familiar with this double phenomenon, Mrs. X?

JANET. Yes. But he isn't so proud of his moles now as he used to be when he was a boy.

ALCAR. Now, gentlemen, you see how beautifully clear the situation is. By one simple act we shall arrive at a definite and final result, and we shall have avoided all the noise and scandal of a public trial. Mr. X, will you oblige us very much by taking your collar off?

JANET [*jumping up*]. Please, there's just one little thing. [*To* CARVE.] Wait a moment, dear. [*To* EBAG.] Mr. Ebag, how many of these pictures did you sell to Mr. Texel?

EBAG. Fifteen.

JANET. And you made a profit of over four hundred pounds on each?

TEXEL [*boisterously laughing, to* EBAG]. You did?

JANET. Fifteen times four hundred — that makes — how much does it make?

TEXEL. Six thousand, madam. Thirty thousand dollars. Great!

JANET [*to* EBAG]. Don't you think we deserve some of that, as it were.

EBAG. Madam, I shall be delighted to pay you five thousand four hundred pounds. That will be equivalent to charging you a nominal commission of ten per cent.

JANET. Thank you.

CARVE. I won't touch a penny of their wretched money.

JANET [*sweetly*]. I wouldn't dream of asking you to, dearest. *I* shall touch it. Goodness knows what street we shall be in after this affair — and with my brewery shares gone simply all to pieces! Now, dearest, you can take it off. [*She resumes her seat.*]

CARVE [*lightly*]. I'm hanged if I do!

ALCAR. But, my dear Mr. X!

CARVE [*lightly*]. I'm dashed if I take my collar off.

CYRUS [*triumphant*]. Ha! I knew it.

CARVE. Why should I offer my skin to the inspection of two individuals in whom I haven't the slightest interest? They've quarrelled about me, but is that a reason why I should undress myself? Let me say again, I've no desire whatever to prove that I am Ilam Carve.

ALCAR. But surely to oblige us immensely, Mr. X, you will consent to give just one extra performance of an operation which, in fact, you accomplish three hundred and sixty-five times every year without any disastrous results.

CARVE. I don't look at it like that. Already my fellow-citizens, expressing their conviction that I was a great artist, have buried me in Westminster Abbey — not *because* I was a great artist, but because I left a couple of hundred thousand pounds for a public object. And now my fellow-citizens, here assembled, want me to convince them that I am a great artist by taking my collar off. I won't do it. I simply will not do it. It's too English. If any person wishes to be convinced that I'm an artist and not a mountebank, let him look at my work [*pointing vaguely to a picture*], because that's all the proof that I mean to offer. If he is blind or shortsighted I regret it, but my neck isn't going to help him.

TEXEL. Brilliant! Then we shall have the trial after all.

CYRUS. Yes, but your brilliant friend will be on his way to South America before then.

JANET [*sweetly to* CYRUS]. I assure you it's quite true about those moles. That's why he wears those collars.

CYRUS [*grimly*]. No doubt. . . . [*Repeating.*] Nevertheless he'll be on his way to South America.

CARVE [*gaily*]. Or Timbuctoo.

CYRUS [*significantly*]. Unless you're stopped.

CARVE. And who's going to stop me? All the laws of this country added together can't make me take my collar off if I don't want to.

CYRUS. What about arresting you for bigamy? What about Holloway? I fancy at Holloway they have a short method with people who won't take their collars off.

CARVE. Well, that will only be another proof that the name of this island is England. It will be telegraphed to the Continent that in order to prove to herself that she possessed a great artist, England had to arrest him for bigamy and shove him into prison. . . . Characteristic! Characteristic!

ALCAR [*who has moved across to* JANET]. Mrs. X, can you—

JANET [*rising to* CARVE, *winningly*]. Now—Ilam. You're only laying up trouble for yourself, and for me too. Do please think of the trial. You know how shy you are and how you tremble at the mere thought of a witness-box.

CYRUS. I can believe it.

CARVE [*smiling at* JANET]. I've got past shyness. I think it was the visit of my fine stalwart sons yesterday that cured me of shyness. I doubt if I shall ever be shy any more.

JANET [*appealingly*]. Dearest, to please me!

CARVE [*curt now for the first time, with a flash of resentment*]. No.

JANET [*after a slight pause; hurt and startled; with absolute conviction, to* LORD LEONARD ALCAR]. It's no use. He's made up his mind.

EBAG. I have an idea that I can persuade—

JANET [*hotly*]. Excuse me. You can't.

EBAG. I have an idea I can. But [*hesitates*] the fact is, not in the presence of ladies.

JANET. Oh. If that's all—[*walks away in a huff*].

EBAG [*to* JANET]. My deepest apologies.

[LORD LEONARD ALCAR *shows* JANET *out.*]

TEXEL. Well, well! What now?

EBAG [*to* CARVE]. You remember Lady Alice Rowfant?

CARVE [*taken aback*]. That doesn't concern you.

EBAG [*ignoring this answer*]. Pardon me if I speak plainly. You were once engaged to marry Lady Alice Rowfant. But a few days before your valet died you changed your mind and left her in the lurch in Spain. Lady Alice Rowfant is now in England. She has been served with a subpœna to give evidence at the trial. And if the trial comes on she will have to identify you and tell her story in court. [*Pause.*] Are you going to put her to this humiliation?

[CARVE *walks about. Then he gives a gesture of surrender.*]

CARVE. The artist is always beaten!

[*With an abrupt movement he pulls undone the bow of his necktie.*]

[*The stage is darkened to indicate the passage of a few minutes.*]

SCENE II.—CARVE *is attempting to retie his necktie.* LORD LEONARD ALCAR *is coming away from door back.* JANET *enters from door,* L.

JANET [*under emotion, to* CARVE]. Then you've done it!

[CARVE *ignores her.*]

ALCAR. Yes, and *I* feel like a dentist.

JANET. You've sent them all away.

ALCAR. I thought you'd like me to. Mr. Ebag took charge of Mr. Texel. Your cousin Cyrus was extremely upset.

JANET. What did she say?

ALCAR. Who say?

JANET. Lady Alice Rowfant, of course. Oh! You needn't pretend! As soon as Mr. Ebag asked me to go out I knew he'd got her up his sleeve.

[*Weeps slightly.*]

ALCAR [*very sympathetically*]. My dear young lady, what is the matter?

JANET [*her utterance disturbed by sobs — indicating* CARVE]. He'd do it for her, but he wouldn't do it for me!

ALCAR. I assure you, Lady Alice Rowfant has not been here.

JANET. Honest?

ALCAR. No. The mere mention of her name was sufficient.

JANET. That's even worse! [*Rushing across to* CARVE *and pettishly seizing his necktie.* CARVE *submits.*] Here! Let me do it — for goodness sake! Great clumsy! [*Still tearful — to* LORD LEONARD ALCAR *as she ties the necktie.*] Somehow I don't mind crying in front of you, because you're so nice and fatherly.

ALCAR. Well, if I'm so fatherly, may I venture on a little advice to you two? [*To* CARVE.] You said you didn't want to be Ilam Carve. *Don't* be Ilam Carve. Let Ilam Carve continue his theoretical repose in the Abbey and you continue to be somebody else. It will save a vast amount of trouble, and nobody will be a penny the worse. Leave England — unobtrusively. If you feel homesick, arrange to come back during a general election, and you will be absolutely unnoticed. You have money. If you need more, I can dispose of as many new pictures as you like to send.

JANET. I don't want him to paint any more pictures.

ALCAR. But he will.

JANET. I suppose he will. Why is it? As if we hadn't had enough bother already through this art business!

ALCAR. Yes. But artists are like that, you know.

JANET [*affectionately reproachful to* CARVE]. Child! Look how nicely I've tied it for you. [*Shakes him.*] Whatever are you dreaming about?

CARVE [*after glancing in mirror reflectively*]. There's only one question. Last time they buried me in the Abbey, — what will they do with me next time?

CURTAIN.

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Other farces:

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What the Public Wants (Arnold Bennett)

Fair and Warmer (Winchell Smith)

QUESTIONS ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE

1. Are the early events of the play probable?

2. Is the play farce or comedy of character?

3. What satire do you find in the play?

4. Mr. Bennett's books are noted for their lack of romance and sentiment. Is *The Great Adventure* an exception?

5. Contrast Ilam and Janet.

6. How does Lady Alice Rowfant figure in the plot?

CLEMENCE DANE

Winifred Ashton, who has adopted the *nom de plume* of "Clemence Dane," is among the foremost women dramatists of our time. Her plays possess a vigor and robustness that are often missing in the work of women writers, and an uncompromising intelligence and disdain of sentimentalism that few of her contemporaries of either sex can equal. These same high qualities distinguish Miss Dane's novels. Such novels as *Regiment of Women, Legend,* and lately her comprehensive study of four generations of a Devonshire family, *The Babyons,* have won her an enthusiastic following. Among her plays *A Bill of Divorcement* (1920) is the best known, although *Will Shakespeare* (in startlingly good blank verse) won critical applause and substantial stage success. *The Way Things Happen* (1923), *Naboth's Vineyard* (1925), and *Granite* (1926) complete the list of her dramas.

Miss Dane, like Robertson and Pinero, received a valuable training in the theatre itself before she composed any plays. Like Pinero she has a keen sense of dramatics and stagecraft and devises her scenes with sure effect. Even if *A Bill of Divorcement* were shorn of its emotional and intellectual implications, it would still be good entertainment because of the sheer drama of such situations as the return of Hilary, the conflict in Margaret's conscience, and Sydney's renunciation of Kit. But *A Bill of Divorcement* is primarily a problem play in the old-fashioned sense of the term: an impassioned argument concerning individual conduct, and a fearless inquiry into the justice of marriage and divorce laws. Although the drama as a type is a problem play, the very human story transcends its social and intellectual interest, thus assuring it a life beyond that of the divorce problem itself. Most problem plays are doomed to interest only as long as the problem is unsolved or controversial; hundreds of plays concerning slavery and woman suffrage are dead beyond all recall. *A Bill of Divorcement,* however, has a more universal dramatic problem — the conflict is in the human soul, and we can see right on both sides. As Mr. S. P. Mais expresses it, the characters are "impaled on the horns of a helpless dilemma."

As a matter of fact the problem never really matters; Margaret is already divorced when the play begins, and the former husband is no longer insane. Our concern is with the sufferings of the individual characters. What should they do? Are they justified in doing what they do? When is personal sacrifice vicious? When the play was first produced in London, it was the feature of the dramatic season,— produced at a time when the divorce bill was under discussion. In New York the play was not an instant success. Critics were somewhat shy and non-committal, and the general public was troubled by what it considered the underlying significance of the drama — a ruthless questioning of the sacredness of the most inelastic social institution, marriage. As the season advanced, however, patronage increased and the play enjoyed a long Broadway run.

Critics have tempered their praise with some sharper criticisms. Some consider the aunt and the rector as of the stage, stagey — mere caricatures. Others declare that Miss Dane cannot create men at all. Another critic thinks that the play diminishes in dramatic value when the double motive for Sidney's renunciation is introduced — the prompting of her biologic conscience when she learns of the insanity of an aunt, and the giving up of marriage in order that she may care for her father. One wonders why she could not marry Kit and care for father, too. More than one critic finds Miss Dane intelligent to the point of inhumanity, a criticism that seems particularly unjust when we note the consistently sympathetic treatment of character in *A Bill of Divorcement.* She is impatient with what she considers obsolete social taboos that bring misery to men and women; she is bitter, not toward man, but toward his stupid and irrational beliefs.

A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT
(1920)

BY

CLEMENCE DANE

CHARACTERS

MARGARET FAIRFIELD
MISS HESTER FAIRFIELD
SYDNEY FAIRFIELD
BASSETT
GRAY MEREDITH
KIT PUMPHREY
HILARY FAIRFIELD
DR. ALLIOT
THE REV. CHRISTOPHER PUMPHREY

SCENE.—*A small house in the country. The action passes on Christmas Day, 1933. The audience is asked to imagine that the recommendations of the* Majority Report of the Royal Commission on Divorce *v.* Matrimonial Causes *have become the law of the land.*

ACT I: The Hall. Morning.

ACT II: The Drawing Room. Early afternoon.

ACT III: The Hall. Late Afternoon.

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A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

ACT I

The curtain rises on the hall, obviously used as the common-room of a country house. On the right (of the audience) is the outer door and a staircase that runs down from an upper landing towards the middle of the room, half hiding what has once been a separate smaller room with a baize door at the back. In the corner a French window opens on to a snow-bound garden. On the left, facing the entrance, a log fire is blazing. Staircase, pictures, grandfather clock, etc., are wreathed with holly and mistletoe. At the breakfast table, which is laid for three and littered with paper and string, sit Miss Hester Fairfield *and* Margaret Fairfield, *her niece by marriage. The third chair has two or three parcels piled up on it.*

Hester Fairfield *is one of those twitching, high-minded, elderly ladies in black, who keep a grievance as they might keep a pet dog — as soon as it dies they replace it by another. The grievance of the moment seems to be the empty third chair, and* Margaret Fairfield *is, as usual, on the defensive. Such a little, pretty, helpless-looking woman as* Margaret *has generally half a dozen big sons and a husband to bully; but* Margaret *has only a daughter, and her way of looking at even the chair on which that daughter ought to be sitting, is the way of a child whose doll has suddenly come to life. For the rest, she is so youthfully anxious and simple and charming that the streak of grey in her hair puzzles you. You wonder what trouble has fingered it. It does not occur to you that she is quite thirty-five.*

Margaret [*apologizing*]. Yes, she is late.

Miss Fairfield. As usual!

Margaret. Oh, well, she was dancing till three. I hadn't the heart to wake her.

Miss Fairfield. Till three, was she? Who brought her home?

Margaret. Kit, of course.

Miss Fairfield. Three o'clock on Christmas morning! I wonder what the Rector said to that.

Margaret. Oh, Kit's on holiday.

Miss Fairfield. I heard you tell her myself to be in by twelve. If anything could make me approve of this marriage of yours —

Margaret. Oh, don't begin it again, Auntie!

Miss Fairfield. — it's that the child will have a strong hand over her at last. A step-father's better than nothing — if you can call him a step-father when her father's still alive.

Margaret. Oh, don't!

Miss Fairfield. What's the use of saying "don't"? He *is* alive. You can't get away from that.

Margaret. Aunt Hester — *please!*

Miss Fairfield. Well, I'm only telling you — if it's got to be, I'm not sorry it's Gray Meredith.

Margaret [*smiling*]. Yes, Sydney knows just how far she may go with Gray.

Miss Fairfield. I see nothing to laugh at in that.

Margaret. It's so funny to think how circumspect you all are with him. He's the one person I've always felt perfectly safe with. I'd ask anything of Gray.

Miss Fairfield [*grimly*]. You always have, my dear!

Margaret. I don't know why you

should be unkind to me on Christmas morning.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a sort of grudging affection*]. I suppose it's because I've only got another week to be unkind to you in.

MARGARET [*restlessly*]. Oh, I wish you didn't hate it so.

MISS FAIRFIELD. My dear, when you see a person you care for, and she your own nephew's wife, on the brink of deadly sin —

MARGARET. Must we begin it again?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I do my duty. If you'd done yours your daughter wouldn't be late for breakfast, and I shouldn't be given the opportunity.

MARGARET. Perhaps I *had* better call her.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Everything getting cold — and so disrespectful! She ought to be taught.

MARGARET [*rising with a sigh*]. You're quite right. [*Calling at the foot of the stairs.*] Sydney, darling, shall I bring you up your coffee?

SYDNEY'S VOICE [*answering*]. It's all right, Mother! I'm coming.

MISS FAIRFIELD. And I suppose that's all you'll say.

[*Sydney comes out of her room. She is physically a bigger, fairer edition of* MARGARET, *but there the likeness ends. Her manner is brisk and decided. She is very sure of herself, but when she loses her temper, as she often does, she loses her aplomb and reveals the schoolgirl. Her attitude to the world is that of justice, untempered, except where her mother is in question, by mercy. But she is very fond of her mother.*]

SYDNEY [*running down the stairs*]. Merry Christmas, everyone! I'm not late, am I? Morning, Auntie! What, no post?

MARGARET. It gets later every year.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I'm very much obliged to you, Sydney, for the — card-case.

SYDNEY [*undoing her parcels*]. It's a cigarette case, Auntie dear. You see, I thought if you gave me a prayer-book again we might do a deal. Ah, I thought so! Thanks most awfully. It's sweet of you. Shall we?

MISS FAIRFIELD. What?

SYDNEY. Swap.

MARGARET. Sydney, dear, that's rather rude.

SYDNEY [*swiftly*]. Well, Mother, I hate being hinted at.

MARGARET [*bewildered*]. Hint? What hint?

SYDNEY. Oh, Mother, you're such a lamb. You never see anything. [*To* MISS FAIRFIELD.] I'm sorry, Auntie, but I'm seventeen, and I've left school, and I'm not going to church to-day, or any day any more, except to chaperon Mother and Gray next week, bless 'em!

MISS FAIRFIELD. I do think, Margaret, she ought at least to call him Uncle.

MARGARET. Aren't you coming with us to-day, darling? Christmas Day?

SYDNEY. Sorry, Mother. It's against my principles. I refuse to kneel down and say I'm a miserable sinner. I'm not miserable and I'm not a sinner, and I cannot tell a lie to please any old — prayer-book. Besides, I'm expecting Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You'll find that Kit takes his mother to church. *She* hasn't lost all her influence —

SYDNEY [*darkly*]. She'll be finding herself up against me soon.

MARGARET [*like a schoolgirl*]. Oh, Sydney, has he? —

SYDNEY. He's trying his hardest to, but I like to sort of *spread* my jam.

MARGARET. Then — then — ?

SYDNEY. I'm not actually engaged, if you mean that — [*Watching their faces mischievously*] but I'm going to be.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Engaged at seventeen! Preposterous!

SYDNEY [*instantly*]. Mother was married at seventeen.

MARGARET. That was the war.

SYDNEY. I don't see what that's got to do with it.

MARGARET [*timidly*]. Sydney — at seventeen, one doesn't know enough —

SYDNEY. One doesn't know the same things, I daresay.

MARGARET. One doesn't know anything at all.

SYDNEY. Yes, but think of the hopeless

sort of world you were seventeen in — even you. As for poor Auntie, as far as knowing things goes —

MARGARET. Sydney, my dear, be good!

SYDNEY. I am being good. I'm returning hint for hint.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*ruffling*]. Is this the way you let your daughter speak to me, Margaret?

SYDNEY [*closing with her*]. You see, she doesn't enjoy being hinted at either.

MARGARET [*between the upper and the nether mill-stone*]. I don't know what you mean, Sydney, but *don't!*

SYDNEY. I mean that I'm not going to let Aunt Hester interfere in my affairs like she does in yours. That's what I mean.

MISS FAIRFIELD. These are the manners they teach you at your fine school, I suppose!

SYDNEY. Never mind, Auntie, I've had my lessons in the holidays too. You needn't think I haven't watched the life you've led Mother over this divorce business.

MARGARET [*distressed at the discussion*]. Sydney! Sydney!

SYDNEY [*remorselessly*]. Well, hasn't she? What prevented you from marrying Gray ages ago? Father's been out of his mind long enough, poor man! You knew you were free to be free. You knew you were making Gray miserable and yourself miserable — and yet, though that divorce law has been in force for years, it's taken you all this time to fight your scruples. At least, you call them scruples! What you really mean is Aunt Hester and her prayer-book. And now, when you have at last consented to give yourself a chance of being happy — when it's Christmas Day and you're going to be married at New Year — still you let Aunt Hester sit at your own breakfast table and insult you with talk about deadly sin. It's no use pretending you didn't, Auntie, because Mother left my door open and I heard you.

MARGARET [*with a certain dignity*]. Sydney, I can take care of myself.

SYDNEY [*oblivious of it*]. Take care of yourself! As if everybody didn't ride rough-shod over you when I'm not there.

MARGARET. Yes, but my pet, you mustn't break out like this. Of course your aunt knows you don't really mean to be rude —

SYDNEY. I do mean to be rude to her when she's rude to you.

MARGARET. My dear, you quite misunderstand your aunt.

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I don't, Mother!

[MARGARET *shrugs her shoulders helplessly and sits down on the sofa to the left of the fireplace.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD [*rising*]. I'm afraid you'll have to go to church without me, Margaret. I'm thoroughly upset. You've brought up your daughter to ignore me, and I know why. I'm the wrong side of the family. I'm the one person in this house who remembers poor Hilary. I shall read the service in the drawing-room. [*She goes out.*]

SYDNEY [*looking after her*]. She owes me something. She's been dying for an excuse, with that cold. [*She turns to the sofa and says more gently.*] What's the use of crying, Mother? If Gray finds out there'll be a row, and then Aunt Hester'll be sorry she ever was born.

MARGARET. It isn't that. You get so excited, Sydney! You remind me — your father was so excitable. I don't like to see it.

SYDNEY. I'm not really. I needn't let myself go if I don't want to.

MARGARET. You mustn't get impatient with your aunt. She can't get accustomed to the new ways, that's all. I — I can't myself, sometimes. [*Restlessly.*] I hope I'm doing right.

SYDNEY. Oh, I do think it's morbid to have a conscience. If Father had been dead fifteen years, would you say, "I hope I'm doing right"? And he *is* dead. His mind's dead. You know you've done all you can. And you're frightfully in love with Gray —

MARGARET [*flushing*]. Don't, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Well, you are, and so he is with you. So what's the worry about? Aunt Hester! What people like Aunt Hester choose to think! I call it morbid.

MARGARET [*whimsically*]. I suppose I haven't brought you up properly. Your aunt's quite right!

SYDNEY. Yes. That's what it always comes back to. "Your aunt's quite right!" I can argue with you by the hour.

MARGARET [*hastily*]. Oh, not this morning, darling, will you?

SYDNEY. —and Gray can argue with you by the hour—

MARGARET [*smiling*]. Ah, but he never does.

SYDNEY. —and you pretend to agree with us; but underneath your common sense, your mind's really thinking—"Your aunt's quite right!"

MARGARET. She stands for the old ways, Sydney.

SYDNEY. She stands for Noah and the flood. She'd no business to go dragging up Father and the divorce on Christmas morning to upset you.

MARGARET. It wasn't your aunt.

SYDNEY. Then it was me, I suppose! "If I could only control my tongue and my temper," and all the rest of it!

MARGARET [*quietly*]. No, it was about Kit.

SYDNEY. Kit? Oh, that's all right, Mother. Don't you worry about me and Kit.

MARGARET. I do.

SYDNEY. You needn't.

MARGARET [*shyly*]. You see, I thought I was in love at seventeen, too.

SYDNEY. Oh, but I quite know what I'm doing.

MARGARET. And now I know I didn't know much about it. I don't want you to be—rushed.

SYDNEY. Nobody could make me do what I didn't want to do.

MARGARET [*forgetting* SYDNEY]. It was nobody's fault. It was the war—

[*She sits, dreaming.*]

SYDNEY. It's extraordinary to me—whenever you middle-aged people want to excuse yourselves for anything you've done that you know you oughtn't to have done, you say it was the war. How could war make you get married if you didn't want to?

MARGARET [*groping for words*]. It was the feel in the air. They say the smell of blood sends horses crazy. That was the feel. One did mad things. Hilary—your father—he was going out—the trenches—to be hurt. And he was so fond of me he frightened me. I was so sorry. I thought I cared. Can't you understand?

SYDNEY. No. Either you care or you don't.

MARGARET [*passionately*]. How can you know until it happens to you? How was I to know there was more to it than keeping house and looking after Hilary—and you? How was I to know?

SYDNEY [*doubtfully*]. Is there so much more to it?

MARGARET. Yes.

SYDNEY. I don't believe there is for some people. Why it's just what I want—to look after Kit and a house of my own, and—oh, at least half a dozen kids.

MARGARET [*uncomfortably*]. Sydney, *dear!*

SYDNEY. Oh, Kit's as keen as I am on eugenics. He's doing a paper for his debating society.

MARGARET. Well, I found you quite enough to manage.

SYDNEY [*leaning over the back of the sofa*]. I believe you were scared of me when I was little— [MARGARET *nods*] and even now—

MARGARET [*quickly*]. What?

SYDNEY [*quite good-humored about it*]. Well, if you had to choose between me and Gray, it wouldn't be Gray who'd lose you.

MARGARET [*confronted with the idea*]. I hope I'd do what's right.

SYDNEY [*airily*]. There you are!

MARGARET [*as it goes home*]. It's not true. You've no right to make me out a heartless mother. But—

SYDNEY [*her arm round her mother's neck*]. Well—heartless Mother?

MARGARET [*clutching at the arm*]. Oh, Sydney—what should I do if Gray—if Gray—

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! [*There is the sound of a motor driving up.*] There is Gray.

MARGARET [*jumping up hurriedly*]. Oh, and I'm not dressed. Say I'll be down in a minute. [*She runs upstairs.*]

SYDNEY. You've plenty of time. The bells haven't begun yet.

MARGARET [*from the gallery*]. Tell Bassett to clear away.

[SYDNEY *rings the bell. The elderly maid enters through the baize door.*]

BASSETT. Yes, Miss?

SYDNEY. You can clear, Bassett!

[*While she is speaking* GRAY MEREDITH *comes in through the hall door. He is about forty, tall, dark and quiet, very sure of himself, and quite indifferent to the effect he makes on other people. As he is a man who never has room in his head for more than one idea at a time, and as for the last five years that idea has been* MARGARET, *the rest of the world doesn't get much out of him. But mention her and he behaves exactly like a fire being poked.*]

GRAY [*putting down a box he carries*]. Where's your mother?

SYDNEY [*folding her hands*]. Good morning, dear Sydney! A merry Christmas to you, and so many thanks for the tie that, with the help of your devoted aunt, you so thoughtfully —

GRAY. Stop it, there's a good child! I haven't missed her, have I?

SYDNEY. Pray accept in return as a small token of esteem and total dependency —

GRAY. I asked you if your mother had started.

SYDNEY [*in her natural voice*]. It's true, you know. You simply daren't cope with me yet.

GRAY [*twinkling in spite of himself*]. Hm! A time will come —

SYDNEY. Wouldn't it warm the cockles of Aunt Hester's heart to hear you! What are cockles, Gray? Gray, she says I ought to call you Uncle! Gray, d'you think you have brought me what I think you have for a Christmas present?

GRAY. You'd better go and look. It's in the motor with Kit.

SYDNEY. It?

GRAY. He.

SYDNEY. By Viscount out of Vixen?

GRAY. Really, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Dear Uncle Hester!

GRAY. Yes, but Sydney — ?

SYDNEY [*at the door*]. Oh, didn't I tell you? Mother says she'll be down in a minute.

[*She lets in the sound of the church bells as she goes out.*]

[GRAY *walks about the room, then, going to the foot of the staircase, he calls softly.*]

GRAY. Margaret! [*He waits a moment: then he calls again.*] Margaret!

[*He listens, takes another turn about the room, then, coming back to the staircase, stands, leaning against the foot of the balusters.* MARGARET *comes softly down the stairs, and bending over, puts her hands on his shoulders.*]

MARGARET. A merry Christmas!

GRAY [*turning round and kissing her*]. And a happy New Year!

MARGARET. It will be — oh, it will be!

GRAY. I almost think it will sometimes. [*Holding her at arm's length.*] New frock?

MARGARET. Like it?

GRAY. Oh, I've seen it already.

MARGARET. Why, it's the first time I've put it on.

GRAY [*untying the box on the table as he speaks*]. Sydney carted it along with her last week when we went to choose — this.

MARGARET [*like a child with a new toy*]. For me, Gray?

GRAY. Looks like it.

MARGARET. Oh, I hope you haven't been extravagant.

GRAY [*opening the lid*]. Well, Sydney said —

MARGARET. Silver fox! Oh, my dear, you shouldn't.

GRAY. Put 'em on. Sydney's quite a wise child.

MARGARET [*luxuriously*]. Oh, I do love being spoiled.

GRAY. You haven't had so much of it, have you, Meg?

MARGARET [*with a complete change of manner*]. Don't!

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. Don't call me Meg.

GRAY. Why not?

MARGARET. You never have before.

GRAY. Don't you see, I want a name for you that no-one else uses.

MARGARET [*close to him*]. Yes, yes, that no-one else has ever used. Not Meg. Not Margaret. Make a name of your own for me — new — new.

GRAY. Well, you're getting one new name pretty soon, anyhow.

MARGARET. Yes. New year — new name — new life. [*In his arms.*] Oh, Gray, is thirty-five very old?

GRAY. Not when you say it.

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, we've time for everything still?

GRAY. Time for everything. [*He laughs.*] Except church, my child! Do you really insist on going?

MARGARET. Aunt Hester will be horrified if I don't. Besides — [*She comes back to the table and begins putting the papers together.*]

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. I suppose you'll think me a fool —

GRAY. Shall I?

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, for the first time in my life I'm happy. I want to say —

GRAY. What does she want to say?

MARGARET. "Humble and hearty thanks — "

[SYDNEY *runs in with a puppy in her arms. She is followed by* KIT. KIT *is a good-looking, fair-haired boy who may be twenty-two, but is nevertheless much younger than* SYDNEY, *whom he takes as seriously as he takes everything else in life. It is part of her charm for him that he finds it a little difficult to keep up with her.*]

SYDNEY. Mother! Mother! Look what Gray's brought me!

MARGARET. Oh, Sydney, your aunt isn't fond of dogs. Merry Christmas, Kit!

KIT. Merry Christmas, Mrs. Fairfield!

SYDNEY. Yes, but isn't he an angel? And Kit's given me a collar for him. [*She goes up to* GRAY.] You know, Gray, it's so sweet of you that in return I'll —

GRAY. Well?

SYDNEY [*conspiratorially*]. Make Kit late for church if you like.

GRAY [*putting himself in her hands*]. I did promise him a lift.

SYDNEY [*settling it*]. He can cut across the fields. [*Aloud.*] Kit, what about a bone for the angel? You might go and make love to Bassett.

[*She puts the dog into his arms. They stroll off together into the inner room.*]

KIT [*earnestly, as he goes out through the baize door*]. He ought to be kept to biscuits.

SYDNEY [*calling to him*]. Just one to gnaw. [*Then, over her shoulder.*] Mother, the bells have been going quite a while.

MARGARET [*to* GRAY]. Listen, don't you love them?

GRAY. Church bells?

MARGARET. Wedding bells.

GRAY. Margaret, you've stepped straight out of a Trollope novel.

MARGARET [*flushing*]. I suppose you think I'm sentimental.

GRAY. No, but you're pure nineteenth century.

MARGARET. I'm not. [*Telephone bell rings.*] Oh!

GRAY. There goes the twentieth. Don't you see how it makes you jump?

[SYDNEY *has gone to the telephone.*]

SYDNEY. Hullo! Hullo! . . . You rang *me* up. [*She hangs up the receiver.*] "Sorry you have been trubbled!" And it's sure to be someone trying to get on.

GRAY. On Christmas morning? Hardly! I say, come along! The bells have stopped.

MARGARET [*in a strange voice*]. Yes, they stopped when that other bell rang.

SYDNEY. Why, Mother, what's the matter?

MARGARET [*blindly*]. They stopped.

SYDNEY. I told you, darling, you're late.

MARGARET. Give me my furs. I'm cold.

[GRAY *helps her on with them.*]

SYDNEY [*proud of her*]. They *are* lovely.

MARGARET [*at the door, wistfully*]. It isn't too good to be true, is it?

GRAY. The furs?

MARGARET. Everything! You — oh, what a fool I am!

[*You hear* GRAY'S *laugh answering hers as they go out together, and the sound of the motor driving away.*]

SYDNEY [*subsiding on the sofa, to* KIT, *who has come in as the others go*]. I thought they'd never get off. Mother has a way of standing around and gently fussing — I tell you I'll be glad when next week's over.

KIT. So'll I. I haven't had a look in lately.

SYDNEY [*with an intimate glance*]. Not last night? But it *has* been a job, running Mother. I'm bridesmaid and best man and family lawyer and Juliet's nurse all rolled into one — and a sort of lightning conductor for Aunt Hester into the bargain. That's why I've had so little time for you. It's quite true what Gray was saying just now — Mother *is* nineteenth century. She's sweet and helpless, but she's obstinate too. My word, the time she took making up her mind to get that divorce!

KIT. It's just about that that I've been wanting to talk to you. You see —

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. You see —

SYDNEY. Hurry up, old thing!

KIT. Well, you see, when I got home last night the governor was sitting up for me.

SYDNEY. He would be.

KIT. And in the course of the row — *you* came in to it.

SYDNEY. Oh, but he likes me.

KIT. Yes, he was quite soothed when I said we were engaged.

SYDNEY. Liar!

KIT [*serenely*]. Oh, well —

SYDNEY [*she finds his chuckle infectious*]. What did he say?

KIT. Oh, lots of rot, of course, about being too young. But he was quite bucked really until —

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. Well, I was a fool. I said something, quite by chance, about your father. Then the fur began to fly. You see, it seems he thought your mother was a widow —

SYDNEY [*ruffling up*]. What's it got to do with him?

KIT. Well, you see —

SYDNEY. If you'd only make me see instead of you seeing me all the time.

KIT. I'm afraid of hurting your feelings.

SYDNEY. I'm not nineteenth century.

KIT [*desperately*]. Well, my people are.

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. That's the trouble — my people are! Father promptly began about not seeing his way to —

SYDNEY. To what, Kit?

KIT. To — to marrying them.

SYDNEY. But I've never heard of anything so crazy.

KIT. Of course, you know, there's nothing to worry about. There are heaps of clergymen who will.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if Mother isn't married in her own parish church she'll think she's living in sin.

KIT. Well, there it is!

SYDNEY. But look here, the old rector knew all about it. Do you mean to say that a new man can come into our parish and insult Mother just because his beastly conscience doesn't work the same way the old rector's did? The divorce is perfectly legal.

KIT [*in great discomfort*]. Yes, Father knows all that. [*Hopefully.*] Of course, I don't see myself why a registry office —

SYDNEY. If it were me I'd prefer it. Much less fuss. But Mother wouldn't.

KIT. But she ought to see —

SYDNEY. But she won't. It's no use reckoning on what people ought to be. You've got to deal with them as they are.

KIT [*guiltily*]. Well, I'm awfully sorry.

SYDNEY. It's no use being sorry. We've got to do something.

KIT [*hopelessly*]. When once the old man gets an idea into his head —

SYDNEY. He'd better not let it out in front of Mother. Gray'd half kill him if he did. And I tell you this, Kit, what Gray leaves I'll account for, even if he is your father. Poor little Mother!

KIT. Well, I'm all on your side, you know that. But of course, Sydney, a clergyman needn't re-marry divorced people. It's in that bill. The governor was quoting it to-day.

SYDNEY. But doesn't he know the circumstances?

KIT. He only knows what I do.

SYDNEY. One doesn't shout things at people, naturally. But it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's only that my unfortunate father has been in an asylum ever since I can remember. Shell-shock. It began before I was born. He never came home again. Mother had to give up going to see him even. It seemed to make him worse.

KIT. Pretty tragic.

SYDNEY. Oh, for years now he hasn't known anyone, luckily. And he's well looked after. He's quite all right.

KIT [*uncomfortably*]. You're a queer girl.

SYDNEY. But he is.

KIT. Yes — but —

SYDNEY. What?

KIT. Your own father —

SYDNEY [*impatiently*]. My dear boy, I've never even seen him. Oh, of course it's very sad, but I can't go about with my handkerchief to my eyes all the time, can I?

KIT. Yes — but —

SYDNEY. I hate cant.

KIT [*leaning over the back of the sofa, his hands playing with her chain*]. You little brute — you're as hard as nails, aren't you?

SYDNEY [*putting up her face to him*]. Am I? [*They kiss.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD [*passing through*]. Really, Sydney! Before lunch!

KIT. You know, old thing, sometimes I don't feel as if I should ever really get on with your aunt.

SYDNEY [*dimpling*]. You'll have to if —

KIT. Good Lord! You don't want her in the house!

SYDNEY [*calmly*]. I must take her off Mother sometimes. That's only fair. But she sha'n't worry you.

KIT. I say, you're going to have things your own way, aren't you?

SYDNEY. But of course I am, darling.

KIT [*heavily*]. But look here — marriage is a sort of mutual show, isn't it? We've got to pull together.

SYDNEY. Of course.

KIT. But suppose we come to a cross-roads, so to speak?

SYDNEY. Well, somebody'll have to give way, won't they, darling?

KIT. Hm!

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if you want a door-mat you'd better look out for someone — someone like poor dear Mother, for instance.

KIT [*wiser than he knows*]. But you *are* like her, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Me? Do you think I'd let my daughter run me the way I run Mother? Not much!

MISS FAIRFIELD [*re-entering*]. I think I left my — [*murmurs*].

SYDNEY [*aside*]. It's no good. She's doing this on purpose because I cheeked her. You'd better go, old man. Besides, they must be well through the anthem.

KIT [*disturbed*]. Good Lord! I should think I had better go!

SYDNEY [*going with him to the door*]. I say, keep your father quiet till I've had time to talk to Gray.

KIT. Right! [*He goes out.*]

SYDNEY [*calling*]. Kit!

KIT [*reappearing*]. Yes?

SYDNEY. Come round in the afternoon.

KIT. Right! [*He goes out.*]

SYDNEY [*calling*]. Kit!

KIT [*reappearing*]. Yes?

SYDNEY. I don't suppose there'll ever be any cross-croads.

KIT. Darling!

[*A scuffle.* SYDNEY *reappears patting her hair.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD. I'm afraid I disturbed a *tête-à-tête*.

SYDNEY [*sweetly*]. Oh, Auntie, whatever made you think that?

MISS FAIRFIELD. But I really couldn't sit in the drawing-room. There's no fire.

[*She sits down and opens her book.*]

SYDNEY [*in a soft little voice, hums*]. "When we are married we'll have sausages for tea."

MISS FAIRFIELD. Do you mind being quiet while I read the service?

SYDNEY. Sorry!

[*She takes up some knitting.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD. What are you doing?

SYDNEY. Tie for Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney! Needlework on Sunday!

SYDNEY. Well, I can't sit in the drawing-room either if there's no fire.

MISS FAIRFIELD. There's no need to lose your temper.

SYDNEY [*out of patience*]. Here, I'm going.

[*As she makes for the staircase the telephone gives a broken tinkle.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I believe that telephone's going off!

SYDNEY. Yes, I'm sure it's someone trying to get on. They've rung up once already.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I won't be left to deal with it. [*The telephone rings deafeningly.*] There, I told you so.

SYDNEY. Well, it's not my fault! [*She takes off the receiver.*] Hullo! Hullo! . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . [*To her aunt.*] It's a trunk call.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Who on earth — ?

SYDNEY. Yes . . . Hullo . . . Yes . . . Mrs. Fairfield's out. Shall I take a message? . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking . . . All right, I'll hold on . . . [*To her aunt.*] Auntie, it's from Bedford. It's about Father. [*Into the telephone.*] Yes . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking . . . What? . . . Good Lord!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, don't say "Good Lord"!

SYDNEY. But you should have let Mrs. Fairfield know! . . . Only this morning? Oh, I see . . . No, we've heard nothing. When did you find out? . . . What makes you — ? I see . . . No, he's not here . . . Of course we'd let you know . . . Then you'll let us know at once if anything . . . yes . . . *Miss* Fairfield. Mrs. Fairfield is going away very soon . . . Thank you . . . Good-bye.

[SYDNEY *hangs up the receiver and turns round.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well?

SYDNEY. Father's got away.

MISS FAIRFIELD. What? Who spoke to you?

SYDNEY. The head man — what's his name? Rogers! Frightfully upset.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I should think so. Why, the poor fellow's dangerous.

SYDNEY. Apparently he's been very much better lately, and this last week, a marked change, he says.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*agitated*]. You mean he's getting well?

SYDNEY. Looks like it. Rogers was awfully guarded but — apparently they'd already written to Uncle Hugh and the solicitors.

MISS FAIRFIELD. They ought to have written to me.

SYDNEY. Of course, they wouldn't write to Mother — now — but we ought to have heard.

MISS FAIRFIELD. When did they miss him?

SYDNEY. This morning. Then a lot about its being inexplicable and the precautions they had taken and so on. The fact remains that he has managed to get away.

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's disgraceful carelessness.

SYDNEY. Their theory is that he has suddenly come to himself. Is it possible, Auntie? Can it happen?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's quite possible. It does. It was the same with my poor sister, Grace. After ten years that was.

SYDNEY. But the doctors said incurable.

MISS FAIRFIELD. The Almighty's greater than the doctors. And nerves — nerves are queer things. I nursed your Aunt Grace. Well, I always told your mother to wait.

SYDNEY [*struck*]. Is that a fact about Aunt Grace? Was she out of her mind too?

MISS FAIRFIELD. She never had to be sent away.

SYDNEY. Nobody ever told me.

MISS FAIRFIELD. There's something in most families.

SYDNEY. But with Father — wasn't it shell-shock?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It was brought on by shell-shock.

SYDNEY. D'you mean that in our family there's insanity?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*fidgeting*]. That's not the way to talk. But we're nervy, all of us, we're nervy. Your poor father

would have been no worse than the rest if it hadn't been for the war.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. What do you mean, "nervy"?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a sidelong glance*]. I mean the way you're taking this.

SYDNEY [*sharply*]. How am I taking it?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*irritated*]. Well, look at you now.

SYDNEY [*coldly*]. I'm perfectly under control.

MISS FAIRFIELD. That's it. It's not natural.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. You mean, I shouldn't bother to control myself if—

MISS FAIRFIELD [*hastily*]. You're too young to think about such things.

SYDNEY. —if I weren't afraid, you mean. Did Mother know—when she married?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I tell you there are troubles in every family, but one doesn't talk about them.

SYDNEY. But did she *know* the trouble was insanity?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*shortly*]. I don't know.

SYDNEY. Did Father?

MISS FAIRFIELD. One always knows in a general sort of way.

SYDNEY [*relentlessly*]. Am I nervy?

MISS FAIRFIELD. Young people don't have nerves.

SYDNEY. Insanity! A thing you can hand on! And I told Kit it was shell-shock!

MISS FAIRFIELD. I don't see what difference it makes to Christopher.

SYDNEY. You don't see what difference—? You don't see—? [*To herself.*] But *I* see. [*There is a pause.*] Aunt Hester, suppose Father really gets well—?

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well?

SYDNEY. Whatever will he do?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's a question of what your mother will do.

SYDNEY. But it won't have anything to do with Mother.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. Won't it?

SYDNEY. What on earth are you driving at?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I can't discuss it with you.

SYDNEY. Why not?

MISS FAIRFIELD. You're too young.

SYDNEY. I'm old enough to be engaged.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You're not engaged.

SYDNEY [*insolently*]. Kissed, then. You saw that half an hour ago, didn't you? I might just as well say I can't discuss it with you because you're too old.

MISS FAIRFIELD. How dare you speak to me like that?

SYDNEY [*beside herself*]. Oh, are all old people such stone walls? Here's a shadow, here's a trouble, here's a ghost in the house—and when I ask you what shall I do, you talk about your blessed dignity!

MISS FAIRFIELD [*rising*]. This is the second time in one morning that you have driven me out of the room.

SYDNEY [*wringing her hands*]. Well, I'm sorry! But I'm so worried. Don't you see I've got to keep it off Mother? and Kit! Oh, I've got to tell Kit! [*Following her irresolutely.*] Auntie, if you'd only be decent. [*But* MISS FAIRFIELD *has gone out.* SYDNEY *turns back into the room.*] If I only knew what to do!

[*She stands hesitating. Then she goes to the telephone: makes a movement as if to take it down but checks herself, shaking her head. She comes back to the sofa at last and flings herself down on it, fidgeting with the cushions and frowning. She is roused by the click of a latch as the French window in the inner room is softly opened, and* HILARY FAIRFIELD *steps over the threshold. He is a big, fresh-colored man with grey hair and bowed shoulders. In speech and movements he is quick and jerky, inclined to be boisterous, but pathetically easy to check. This he knows himself, and he has, indeed, an air of being always in rebellion against his own habit of obedience. He comes in, treading softly, his bright eyes dancing with excitement, like a*

child getting ready to spring a surprise on somebody. Something in the fashion of the empty room (for he does not see SYDNEY *crouching in the cushions) disconcerts him. He hesitates. The happy little smile fades. His eye wanders from one object to another and he moves about, recognising a picture here, fingering there an unfamiliar hanging, as it were losing and finding himself a dozen times in his progress round the room. He comes to a stand at last before the fire-place, warming his hands. Then he takes out a pipe and with the other hand feels absently along the mantelpiece for the matches.* SYDNEY, *who has been watching him with a sort of breathless sympathy, says softly:*—]

SYDNEY. What are you looking for?

HILARY. They've moved my—[*with a start*] eh? [*He turns sharply and sees her.*] Meg! It's Meg! [*With a rush.*] Oh, my own darling!

SYDNEY [*her confidence in her power to deal with the situation suddenly gone*]. I—I'm not Meg.

HILARY [*boisterously*]. Not Meg! Tell me I don't know Meg! [SYDNEY *gives a nervous schoolgirl giggle.*] Eh? [*Then, his voice changing completely.*] No, it's not Meg. [*Uneasily.*] I beg your pardon. I thought you were—another girl. I've been away a long time.

SYDNEY. Whom do you want?

HILARY [*startled again*]. There, you see, it's her voice too. Who are you?

SYDNEY [*fencing*]. How did you get in.

HILARY. Tool-shed gate. [*Louder.*] Who are you?

SYDNEY. Where have you come from?

HILARY. Bedford. Took a car. [*Lashing himself into an agitation.*] Who are you?

SYDNEY. Whom do you want to see?

HILARY [*losing all control*]. Who are you?

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. I think I'm your daughter.

[HILARY *stares at her blankly. Then he bursts out laughing.*]

HILARY. Daughter! Daughter! By God, that's good! My wife isn't my wife, she's my daughter! And my daughter's seventeen and I'm twenty-two.

SYDNEY. You're forgetting what years and years—

HILARY. Yes, of course. It's years and years. It's a life-time. It's my daughter's life-time. What's your name—daughter?

SYDNEY. Sydney.

HILARY. Sydney. Sydney, eh? My mother was Sydney. I like Sydney. I—[*Catching at his dignity.*] I suppose we're rather a shock to each other—Sydney.

SYDNEY. No. You're not a shock to me. But I'm afraid—

HILARY [*breaking in*]. Is my—? Is your—? Where's Margaret?

SYDNEY. At church.

HILARY. Back soon, eh?

SYDNEY. Yes, that's why I'm afraid—

HILARY [*unheeding*]. I might go to meet her, eh?

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Oh, I wouldn't. Come and sit down and wait for her and talk.

HILARY [*obediently*]. Very well. [*He sits down beside her on the sofa. They look at each other. He says shyly.*] I say, isn't this queer?

SYDNEY. It makes me want to cry.

HILARY. Why? That's all over, Laugh! Laugh! That's the thing to do. What a lovely room this is! I can't say I like the new paper—or the curtains!

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Yes, I liked the old red ones, too. [*Then, with an effort.*] Those — aren't — the only changes. Everything changes—

HILARY [*swiftly*]. But your Aunt Hester hasn't, eh? [*They look at each other and laugh.*] And I bet you—I say, is your mother such a darling still?

SYDNEY [*recalled to the business before her, brusquely*]. Look here—Father—

HILARY [*savoring it*]. "Father!" "Father!" Well?

SYDNEY. We've got to talk. We've

got to get things straight before she comes back.

HILARY [*his eye and his attention beginning to wander*]. Back soon, eh? Why has Meg moved the clock? It was much better where we put it. Must get it put back. Nearly one. She's late, isn't she? I—I really think, you know, I'll go out and meet your mother.

SYDNEY [*authoritatively*]. You're to stay here.

HILARY [*beginning obediently*]. Very well—[*He flares suddenly.*] I'll do as I like about that.

SYDNEY [*passionately*]. I'll not have you frighten her.

HILARY. I? [*He smiles securely.*]

SYDNEY. Can't you realize what the shock—?

HILARY [*blissfully*]. Never known anyone die of joy yet!

SYDNEY. Father, you don't understand! You and mother—

HILARY [*getting irritated*]. Look here, this is nothing to do with you—

SYDNEY. But you mustn't—

HILARY [*violently*]. Now I tell you I'm not going to be hectored. I won't stand it. I've had enough of it. D'you hear? I've had enough of it.

SYDNEY. If you talk to my mother like this—

HILARY [*softening*]. Meg understands.

SYDNEY [*jealously*]. So do I understand.

HILARY. I believe you do. You got wild all in a moment. That's my way, too. It means nothing. Meg can't see that it means nothing. But it makes a man wild, you know, to be dragooned when he's as sane as—my God, I *am* sane! That's all over, isn't it? I am sane. Daughter!

SYDNEY [*watching him*]. Father?

HILARY. Don't let me get—that way. It's bad. Help me to go slow. I'm as well as you are, you know. But it's new. It only happened to-day—like a curtain lifting. [*Confidentially.*] You see I was standing in the garden—

SYDNEY. I can't conceive how you got away.

HILARY. Led. Like Peter out of prison. I went through the gate, openly. Their eyes were blinded. [*With a complete change of tone.*] Pure luck, you know. There were visitors going out—and I nipped along with them, talking. No-one spotted me. I wouldn't have believed it possible. Heaps of us—of them, I mean—have tried, you know.

SYDNEY. But you'd no money.

HILARY [*whimsically*]. I took the first taxi I saw. Promised him double. He's at the lower gate now, waiting to be paid.

SYDNEY. Father, *dear!* Ticking away the tuppences! We're not millionaires!

HILARY [*carelessly*]. Your mother'll see to it. [*Sound of a motor horn.*] That's him! I suppose he's got tired of waiting and come round.

SYDNEY. No, no! That'll be Mother. You mustn't stop here. You must let me tell her. You must let me tell her first. [*She goes out hurriedly.*]

HILARY. Your mother, is it? Your mother, eh? Here—child—a minute, give me a minute! give me a minute!

MARGARET [*as she comes in*]. No—he couldn't. But he's coming round directly after lunch—Hilary!

HILARY [*like a man who can't see*]. Meg! Is it Meg? Meg, I've come home.

MARGARET [*terrified*]. Sydney, don't go away!

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother!

HILARY. Meg!

MARGARET. But they said—they said—incurable. They shouldn't have said—incurable.

HILARY. What does it matter? I'm well. I'm well, Meg! I tell you—it came over me like a lantern flash—like a face turning to you. I was in the garden, you know—lost. I was a lost soul—outcast! No hope. I can never make anyone understand. I was never like the rest of them. I was sane, always—but—the face was turned away.

SYDNEY. What face?

HILARY. The face of God.

MARGARET. Sydney—is he—?

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! That isn't madness. He's come to himself.

MARGARET. Then — then — what am I to do?

HILARY. What's that?

[*He comes nearer.*]

MARGARET. I — I —

HILARY [*staring at her*]. You don't say a word. One would think you weren't glad to see me. Aren't you glad to see me?

MARGARET. Of course — glad — you poor Hilary!

HILARY. If you knew what it is to say to myself — I'm at home! That place — !

MARGARET [*mechanically*]. Oh, but there was every comfort.

HILARY. Hell! Hell!

MARGARET [*insisting*]. But they were good to you?

HILARY. Good enough.

MARGARET [*in acute distress*]. They didn't — ill-treat — ?

SYDNEY. Mother, you know you did the very best —

HILARY. If it had been heaven — what difference does it make? I was a dead man. Do you know what the dead do in heaven? They sit on their golden chairs and sicken for home. Why did you never come?

MARGARET. They wouldn't let me. It made you worse.

HILARY. Because I wanted you so.

MARGARET. But you didn't know me.

HILARY. My voice didn't — and my speech and my actions didn't. But I knew you. Meg — behind the curtain — behind the dreams and the noises, and the abandonment of God — I wanted you. I wanted — I wanted — [*He puts his hand to his head.*] Look here — I tell you we mustn't talk of these things. It's not safe, I tell you. When I talk I see a black hand reaching up through the floor — do you see? there — through the widening crack of the floor — to catch me by the ankle and drag — drag —

SYDNEY. Father — Father — go slow!

MARGARET [*terrified*]. Sydney!

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! We'll manage.

HILARY [*turning to her*]. Yes, you tell your mother. I'm all right! You understand that, don't you? Once it was a real hand. Now I know it's in my mind. I tell you, Meg, I'm well. But it's not safe to think about anything but — Oh, my dear, the holly and the crackle of the fire and the snow like a veil of peace on me — and you like the snow — so still! —

[*He comes to her with outstretched arms.*]

MARGARET [*faintly*]. No — no — no —

HILARY [*exalted*]. Yes — yes — yes!

[*He catches her to him.*]

MARGARET. For pity's sake, Hilary — !

BASSETT [*entering*]. Lunch is served, Ma'am!

MARGARET [*helplessly*]. Sydney?

SYDNEY. Lay an extra cover. This — my — this gentleman is staying to lunch.

HILARY [*boisterously*]. Staying to lunch! to lunch! That's a good joke, isn't it? I say, listen! I'm laughing. Do you know, I'm laughing? It's blessed to laugh. Staying to lunch! Yes, my girl! Lunch and tea and supper and breakfast, thank God! and for many a long day!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The curtain rises on MARGARET'S *drawing-room. It is prettily furnished in a gentle, white-walled, water-color-in-gold-frame fashion, and is full of flowers. In one corner is a parrot in a cage, and near it* MISS FAIRFIELD'S *arm-chair and foot-stool and work-table. The fire-place has a white sheepskin in front of it, and brass fire-irons: on the mantelpiece is a gilt clock and many photographs. At right angles to the fire a low empire couch runs out into the room. There is a hint of* SYDNEY *in the ultra-modern cushionry with which it is piled. As the curtain goes up* BASSETT *is showing in* GRAY MEREDITH.

BASSETT. They're still at lunch, Sir.

GRAY [*glancing at the clock*]. They're late.

BASSETT. It's the visitor, Sir. He's kept them talking.

GRAY. Visitor?

BASSETT. Yes, Sir, a strange gentleman. Will you take coffee, Sir?

GRAY. I may as well go in and have it with them.

BASSETT. The mistress said, would you not, Sir. She'd come to you.

GRAY [*a little surprised*]. Oh, very well.

BASSETT. I'll tell Miss Sydney you've come, Sir.

GRAY [*lifting his eyebrows*]. Tell Mrs. Fairfield.

BASSETT. Miss Sydney said I was to tell her too, Sir, quietly.

GRAY [*puzzled*]. Is — ? [*He checks an impulse to question the servant.*] All right!

BASSETT. Thank you, Sir.

[*She goes out, leaving the door open. There is a slight pause.* MARGARET *comes in hurriedly, shutting the door behind her.*]

GRAY [*smiling*]. Well, what's the mystery?

MARGARET. Gray, he's come back!

GRAY. Who?

MARGARET. Hilary!

GRAY [*lightly*]. Hilary? What Hilary? *Hilary!*

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Good God!

MARGARET. He got away. He came straight here. I found him with Sydney.

GRAY. Don't be frightened. I'm here. Is he dangerous?

MARGARET. No, no, poor fellow!

GRAY. You can't be sure. Anyway, I'd better take charge of him while you phone the asylum. No, that won't do, there are no trains. We must ring up the authorities.

MARGARET. Oh, no, Gray!

GRAY. It's not pleasant, but it's the only thing to do.

MARGARET. You don't understand.

GRAY. There's only one way to deal with an escaped lunatic.

MARGARET. But he's not. He's well.

GRAY. What's that?

MARGARET. He's well. He knows me. He —

GRAY. I don't believe it.

MARGARET. Do you think I want to believe it? Oh, what a ghastly thing to say!

GRAY. This has nothing to do with you. He has nothing to do with you. Leave me to deal with him.

[*He goes towards the door.*]

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. 'Phoning for Dr. Alliot to begin with.

MARGARET. Sydney's done that already.

GRAY. Sydney's head's on her shoulders.

MARGARET. He'll be here as soon as he can. He can always manage Hilary.

GRAY. You'd better go up to your room.

MARGARET. No.

GRAY. Don't take it too hard. It'll be over in an hour. We'll get him away quietly, poor devil.

MARGARET. But it's no good, Gray, he's well. We've been on to the asylum already. They say we should have heard in a day or two even if he hadn't got away.

GRAY. Really well?

MARGARET. The old Hilary — voice and ways and — oh, my God! what am I to do?

GRAY. Do? You?

MARGARET. Don't you see, he knows nothing? His hair's grey and he talks as he talked at twenty. It's horrible.

GRAY. What do you mean, he knows nothing?

MARGARET. About the divorce. About you and me. He thinks it's all — as he left it.

GRAY [*incredulously*]. You've said nothing?

MARGARET. He's like a lost child come home. Do you think I want to send him crazy again? He —

GRAY [*with a certain anger*]. You've said nothing?

MARGARET. Not yet.

GRAY. You'll come away with me at once.

MARGARET. I can't. I've got to think of Hilary.

GRAY. You've got to think of me.

MARGARET. I *am* you. But I've done him so much injury—

GRAY. *You've* done Fairfield injury? You little saint!

MARGARET. Saint? I'm a wicked woman. I'm wishing he hadn't got well. I'm wishing the doctors will say it's not true. In my wicked heart I'm calling down desolation on my own husband.

GRAY. You have no husband. You're marrying me in a week. You're mine.

MARGARET. I'm afraid—

GRAY. Whose are you? Answer me.

MARGARET. Yours.

GRAY. You know it?

MARGARET. I know it.

GRAY. Then never be afraid again.

MARGARET. No, not when you're here. I'm not afraid when you're here. But I must be good to Hilary. You see that?

GRAY. What good is "good" to him, poor devil?

MARGARET. At least I'll break it gently.

GRAY. Gently? That's just like a woman. All you can do for him is to come away now.

MARGARET. How can I? He's got to be told.

GRAY. Then let me tell him.

MARGARET. No, no! From you, just from you, it would be wanton. I won't have cruelty.

GRAY. We'll go straight up to town and get married at once. That'll settle everything.

MARGARET. You mustn't rush me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY. It is right. There's nothing else to be done. You can't stay here.

MARGARET. No, I can't stay here. Don't let me stay here.

GRAY. Come with me. The car's outside. You say Alliot will be here in ten minutes. Leave him a note. He's an old friend as well as a doctor. Let him deal with it if you won't let me.

MARGARET. Oh, can't you see that I must tell Hilary myself?

GRAY [*angrily*]. Women are incomprehensible!

MARGARET. It's men who are incomprehending. Can't you feel that it'll hurt him less from me?

GRAY. It'll hurt him ten thousand times more.

MARGARET. But differently. It's the things one might have said that fester. At least I'll spare him that torment. He shall say all he wants to say.

GRAY [*blackly*]. I suppose the truth is that there's something in the very best of women that enjoys a scene.

MARGARET. That's the first bitter thing you've ever said to me.

GRAY [*breaking out*]. Can't you see what it does to me to know you are in the same house with him? For God's sake come out of it!

MARGARET [*close to him*]. I want to come, now, this moment. I want to be forced to come.

GRAY. That settles it.

MARGARET [*eluding him*]. But I mustn't! Don't you see that I mustn't? I can't leave Sydney to lay my past for me.

GRAY. Your past is dead.

MARGARET. It's ghost's awake and walking.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg! Meg!

MARGARET [*clinging to him*]. Listen, it's calling to me.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg, where are you?

MARGARET. It's too late! I'm too old! I shall never get away from him. I told you it was too good to be true.

GRAY [*deliberately matter-of-fact*]. Listen to me! I am going home now. There are orders to be given. I must get some money and papers. But I shall be back here in an hour. I give you just that hour to tell him what you choose. After that you'll be ready to come.

MARGARET. If—if I've managed—

GRAY. There's no if. You're coming.

MARGARET. Am I coming, Gray?

HILARY [*entering from the hall*]. Meg, Sydney said you'd gone to your room. Hullo! What's this? Who's this? Doctor, eh? I've been expecting them down on me. [*To* GRAY.] It's no good, you know. I'm as fit as you are. Any test you like.

MARGARET. Mr. Meredith called to see me, Hilary! He's just going.

HILARY. Oh, sorry!

[*He walks to the fire and stands warming his hands, but watching them over his shoulder.*]

GRAY [*at the door, in a low voice to* MARGARET.] I don't like leaving you.

MARGARET. You must! It's better! But — come back quickly!

GRAY. You'll be ready?

MARGARET. I will.

[GRAY *goes out.*]

HILARY [*uneasily*]. Who's that man?

MARGARET. His name's Gray Meredith.

HILARY. What's he doing here?

MARGARET. He's an old friend.

HILARY. I don't know him, do I?

MARGARET. It's since you were ill. It's the last five years.

HILARY. He's in love with you! I tell you, the man's in love with you! Do you think I'm so dazed and crazed I can't see that? You shouldn't let him, Meg! You're such a child you don't know what you're doing when you look and smile —

MARGARET [*in a strained voice*]. I do know.

[*She stands quite still in the middle of the room, her head lifted, a beautiful woman.*]

HILARY [*staring at her*]. Lord, I don't wonder at him, poor brute! [*Still staring.*] Meg, you've changed.

MARGARET [*catching at the opening*]. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. Taller, more beautiful — and yet I miss something.

MARGARET [*urging him on*]. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY [*wistfully*]. — something you used to have — kind — a kind way with you. The child's got it. Sydney — my daughter, Sydney! She's more you than you are. You — you've grown right up — away — beyond me — haven't you?

MARGARET. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. But I'm going to catch up. You'll help me to catch up with you — Meg? [*She doesn't answer.*] Meg! wait for me! Meg, where are you? Why don't you hold out your hands?

MARGARET [*wrung for him*]. I can't Hilary! My hands are full.

HILARY [*his tone lightening into relief*]. What Sydney? She'll be off in no time. She's told me about the boy — what's his name — Kit — already.

MARGARET. It's not Sydney.

HILARY. What? [*Crescendo.*] Eh? What are you driving at? What are you trying to tell me? What's changed you? Why do you look at me sideways? Why do you flinch when I speak loudly? Yes — and when I kissed you — It's that man! [*He goes up to her and takes her by the wrist, staring into her face.*] Is it true? *You?*

MARGARET [*pitifully*]. I've done nothing wrong. I'm trying to tell you. I only want to tell you and make you understand. Hilary, fifteen years is a long time —

HILARY [*dully*]. Yes. I suppose it's a long time for a woman to be faithful.

MARGARET. That's it! That's the whole thing! If I'd loved you it wouldn't have been long —

HILARY [*violently, crying her down*]. You did love me once.

MARGARET [*beaten*]. Did I — once? I don't know —

[*There is a silence.*]

HILARY [*without expression*]. What do you expect me to do? Forgive you?

MARGARET [*stung*]. There's nothing to forgive. [*Softening.*] Oh, so much, Hilary, to forgive each other; but not that.

HILARY [*more and more roughly as he loses control of himself*]. Divorce you then? Because I'll not do that! I'll have no dirty linen washed in the courts.

MARGARET [*forced into the open*]. Hilary, I divorced you twelve months ago.

HILARY [*shouting*]. What? What? What?

MARGARET. I divorced you —

HILARY [*beside himself*]. You're mad! You couldn't do it! You'd no cause! D'you think I'm to be put off with your lies? Am I a child? You'd no cause! Oh, I see what you're at. You want to confuse me. You want to pull wool over my eyes. You want to drive me off my head — drive me mad again. You devil! You devil! You shan't do it. I've got friends — Sydney! Where's

that girl? [*Shouting.*] Sydney! Hester! All of you! Come here! Come here, I say!

[Sydney *opens the drawing-room door.*]

Sydney. Mother, what is it? [*She enters, followed by* Miss Fairfield. *To* Hilary —] What are you doing? You're frightening her.

Hilary [*wildly*]. No, no! You're not on her side. You're little Sydney — kind — my Sydney! What did you say — go slow, eh! Keep your hand here — cool, cool. [*Then as* Sydney, *breaking from him, makes a movement to her mother.*] Stand away from that woman!

Margaret. Sydney, humor him.

Hilary [*at white heat*]. What was I calling you for, eh? Oh, yes, a riddle. I've got a riddle for you. There was a man at that place — used to ask riddles — the moon told 'em to him. Just such a white face whispering out the blue — lies! He couldn't find the answers — sent him off his head. But I know the answer. When's a wife not a wife, eh? Want to know the answer? [*Pointing to* Margaret.] When she's *this* — *this* — *this!* [*Confidentially.*] She's poisoning me.

Miss Fairfield. Now, Hilary! Hilary! —

Hilary. Sydney, come here! I'll tell *you.* [Sydney *stands torn between the two.*]

Miss Fairfield. What have you done to him, Margaret?

Margaret. I've told him the truth.

Miss Fairfield. God forgive you!

Hilary [*raving*]. I tell you she's pouring poison into my ear. You remember that fellow in the play — and *his* wife? That's what she's done. If I told you what she said to me, you'd think I was mad. And that's what she wants you to think. She wants to get rid of me. She's got a tame cat about the place. I'm in the way. And so she comes to me, d'you see, and tells me — what do you think? She says she's not my wife. What do you think of that?

Miss Fairfield [*grimly*]. You may well ask.

Margaret [*to* Sydney]. He won't listen —

Sydney. Sit down, darling! You're shaking.

Margaret. He's always had these rages. It's my fault. I began at the wrong end. Hilary — it's not — I'm not what you think.

Hilary. Then what was that man doing in my house?

Margaret. In a week I'm going to marry him.

Hilary. D'you hear? To *me* she says this! Is she mad or am I?

Margaret [*desperately*]. I tell you there's been a law passed —

Miss Fairfield. No need for him to know that now, Margaret!

Sydney. Of course he has to know.

Miss Fairfield. Not now.

Margaret [*on the defensive*]. I don't know what you mean, Aunt Hester!

Miss Fairfield. Let us rather thank God that he has come back in time.

Margaret [*uneasy*]. In time? In time?

Miss Fairfield. To snatch a brand from the burning.

Margaret. I'm a free woman. I've got my divorce.

Miss Fairfield. Whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.

Margaret [*at bay*]. I'm a free woman. I'm going to marry Gray Meredith. This is a trap! Sydney!

Miss Fairfield. Is this talk for a young girl to hear?

Margaret. Sydney, you're to fetch Gray.

Hilary [*with weak violence*]. If he comes here I'll kill him.

Margaret [*catching* Sydney *back*]. No, no! D'you hear him? What am I to do?

Sydney. It's all right, Mother! We'll manage somehow.

Bassett [*entering*]. Dr. Alliot is in the hall, ma'am.

Margaret [*with a gasp of relief*]. Ask him to come in here. At once.

[Dr. Alliot *trots in. He is pleasant, round-about, clean little old man, with a twinkling face and brisk*

chubby movements of the hands. He is upright and his voice is strong. He wears his seventy odd years like a good joke that he expects you to keep up, in spite of the fact that he is really your own age and understands you better than you do yourself. But behind his comfortable manner is a hint of authority which has its effect, especially on HILARY.]

DR. ALLIOT. What's all this I hear? Well, well! Good afternoon, Mrs. Fairfield! Good afternoon, Miss Fairfield! Merry Christmas, Sydney! Now then, now for him! Welcome back, Fairfield! Welcome back, my boy!

HILARY. It's — it's old Alliot, isn't it?

DR. ALLIOT. Your memory's all right I see.

HILARY. I suppose they've sent for you —

DR. ALLIOT. Well, well, you see, you've arrived rather unconventionally. I've been in touch with —

HILARY. That place?

DR. ALLIOT. Why, yes! You may have to go back, you know. Formalities! Formalities!

HILARY. I don't mind. I'm well. I'm well, Alliot! I'm not afraid of what you'll say. I'm not afraid of any of you.

DR. ALLIOT. Well, well, well! that sounds hopeful.

HILARY. But I can't go yet, Doctor.

DR. ALLIOT. Only for a day or two.

HILARY. It's my wife. I lost my temper. I do lose my temper. It means nothing. Go slow, eh? My wife's ill, Doctor. She's not right in her head.

DR. ALLIOT [*alert*]. Ah!

HILARY [*with a wave of his hand*]. So are the rest of them. Mad as hatters.

DR. ALLIOT. Hm!

HILARY [*checked, glances at him keenly a moment. Then chuckling*]. Oh, you're thinking that's a delusion.

DR. ALLIOT [*humoring him*]. Between you and me, it's a common one.

HILARY [*half flattered*]. Ah, we know, don't we? Served in the same shop, eh? Only the counter between us.

DR. ALLIOT [*feeling his way*]. Well, well —

HILARY. But look here! She says she's not my wife.

DR. ALLIOT [*enlightened*]. Oh! Oh, that's the trouble!

HILARY. She says she's not my wife.

DR. ALLIOT [*soberly*]. It's a hard case, Fairfield.

HILARY. What d'you mean by that?

DR. ALLIOT. It's the old wisdom of the scapegoat — it is expedient — how does it go? expedient — ?

SYDNEY. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people."

DR. ALLIOT. That's it! A hard word, but a true one.

HILARY. What has that got to do with me?

DR. ALLIOT. Well, the situation is this —

HILARY. There is no situation. I married Meg. I fell ill. Now I'm well again. I want my wife.

DR. ALLIOT. Why, yes — yes —

HILARY [*picking it up irritably*]. "Yes — yes —" "Yes — yes —" I suppose that's what you call humoring a lunatic.

DR. ALLIOT. Why, I hope to be convinced, Fairfield, that that trouble's over, but —

HILARY. But you're going to lock me up again because I want my wife.

DR. ALLIOT [*patiently*]. Will you let me put the case to you?

HILARY. You can put fifty cases. It makes no difference.

SYDNEY [*at his elbow, softly*]. Father, I'd listen.

HILARY [*slipping his arm through hers*]. Eh? Sydney? that you? You're not against me, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Nobody's against you. We only want you to listen.

HILARY. Well, out with it!

DR. ALLIOT. D'you remember — can you throw your mind back to the beginning of the agitation against the marriage laws? No, you were a schoolboy —

HILARY. Deceased wife's sister, eh? That's the law that lets a man marry his sister-in-law and won't let a woman marry her brother-in-law. Pretty good, that, for your side of the counter.

DR. ALLIOT. Well, well, that hardly matters now.

HILARY. It shows what your rotten, muddle headed laws are worth, anyhow.

SYDNEY. Father.

HILARY. All right! Go ahead! Go ahead!

DR. ALLIOT. Well, as the result of that agitation — and remember, Hilary, what thousand, thousand tragedies must have had voice in such an outcry — a commission was appointed to enquire into the working of the divorce laws. It made its report, recommended certain drastic reforms, and there, I suppose, as is the way with commissions, would have been the end of the subject, if it hadn't been for the war — and the war marriages.

HILARY [*lowering*]. So that's where I come in! Margaret, is that where I come in?

DR. ALLIOT. Never, I suppose, in one decade were there so many young marriages. Happy? that's another thing! Marry in haste —

MARGARET. They weren't all happy.

DR. ALLIOT. But they were *young*, those boys and girls who married. As young as Kit, and as impatient as Sydney. And that saved them. That young, young generation found out, out of their own unhappiness, the war taught them, what peace couldn't teach us — that when conditions are evil it is not your duty to submit — that when conditions are evil, your duty, in spite of protests, in spite of sentiment, your duty, though you trample on the bodies of your nearest and dearest to do it, though you bleed your own heart white, your duty is to see that those conditions are changed. If your laws forbid you, you must change your laws. If your church forbids you, you must change your church; and if your God forbids you, why, then, you must change your God.

MISS FAIRFIELD. And we who will not change?

MARGARET. Or cannot change — ?

DR. ALLIOT. Stifle. Like a snake that can't cast its skin. Grow or perish — it's the law of life. And so, when this young generation — yours, not mine, Hilary — decided that the marriage laws were, I won't say evil, but outgrown, they set to work to change them.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You needn't think it was without protest, Hilary. I joined the anti-divorce league myself.

DR. ALLIOT. No, it wasn't without protest. Mrs. Grundy and the churches are protesting still. But in spite of protest, no man or woman to-day is bound to a drunkard, an habitual criminal, or —

HILARY. Or — ?

DR. ALLIOT. Or to a partner who, as far as we doctors know —

HILARY. But you can't be sure!

DR. ALLIOT. I say as far as we know, is incurably insane — in practice, is insane for more than five years.

HILARY. And if he recovers? Look at me!

DR. ALLIOT [*with a sigh*]. "It is expedient —"

HILARY. And you call that justice!

MARGARET. At least call it mercy. All the days of your life to stand at the window, Hilary, and watch the sun shining on the other side of the road — it's hard, it's hard on a woman.

DR. ALLIOT. At least call it common sense. If a man can't live his normal life, it's as if he were dead. If he's an incurable drunkard, if he's shut away for life in prison —

HILARY. But I'm not a drunkard. I'm not a convict. I've done nothing. I've been to the war, to fight, for her, for all of you, for my country, for this law-making machine that I've called my country. And when I've got from it, not honorable scars, not medals and glory, but sixteen years in hell, then when I get out again, then the country I've fought for, the laws I've fought for, the woman I've fought for, they say to me, "As you've done without her for fifteen years you can do without her altogether." That's what it is. When I was helpless they conspired behind my back to take away all I had from me. [*To* MARGARET.] Did I ever hurt you? Didn't I love you? Didn't you love me? Could I help being ill? What have I done?

SYDNEY. You died, Father.

MARGARET. Sydney, don't be cruel.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Ah, we cry after the dead, but I've always wondered what their welcome back would be.

HILARY. Well, you know now.

DR. ALLIOT. I don't say it isn't hard—

HILARY. Ah, you don't say it isn't hard. That's good of you. That's sympathy indeed. And my wife—she's full of it too, isn't she? "Poor dear! I was married to him once. I'd quite forgotten."

MARGARET. For pity's sake, Hilary!

DR. ALLIOT. Why, face it, man! One of you must suffer. Which is it to be? The useful or the useless? the whole or the maimed? the healthy woman with her life before her, or the man whose children ought never to have been born?

HILARY [*in terrible appeal*]. Margaret!

SYDNEY. Is that true, Dr. Alliot? Is that true?

MARGARET [*her voice shaking*]. I think you go too far.

DR. ALLIOT. Mrs. Fairfield, in this matter I cannot go too far.

MISS FAIRFIELD. For me, at any rate—too far and too fast altogether! Before ladies! It's not nice. It's enough to call down a judgment.

BASSETT [*entering*]. Mr. Pumphrey to see you, ma'am. [*To* SYDNEY.] And Mr. Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*justified*]. Ah!

MARGARET. I can't see anyone.

BASSETT. He said, ma'am, it was important.

HILARY. Who? Who?

MISS FAIRFIELD. The Rector. I expect he's heard about you.

HILARY. I can't see him. I won't see him. Let me go. I've met the Levites. Spare me the priest.

[*He breaks away from them and goes stumbling out at the other door.*]

SYDNEY [*following him anxiously*].

DR. ALLIOT [*preventing her*]. No, no, my child! I'll look after him.

[*He goes out quickly.*]

The RECTOR *is an insignificant man, with an important manner and a plum in his mouth. He enters with* KIT, *who is flushed and perturbed.*]

RECTOR. Ah, good afternoon, Mrs. Fairfield—Miss Fairfield—

MARGARET [*mechanically. She is very tired and inattentive*]. A happy Christmas, Mr. Pumphrey!

RECTOR. Ah! Just so! Christmas afternoon. An unusual day to call, Mrs. Fairfield, and, I fear, an inconvenient hour—

MARGARET. Not at all, Mr. Pumphrey.

RECTOR. I can give myself [*he takes out his watch*] till three fifteen, no longer. The children's service is at three thirty.

MARGARET [*turning to the bell*]. Mayn't I order you an early cup of tea?

RECTOR. Thank you, thank you, no. Busy as I am, I should not have disturbed you—

MISS FAIRFIELD. Rector, it's as if you had been sent!

RECTOR. Ah! gratifying! I did not see you at the morning service, Miss Fairfield. But last night—*late* last night—

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a look at* SYDNEY]. Three A.M., Rector?

RECTOR. Three fifteen, Miss Fairfield.

KIT. Look here, Father—

RECTOR. I received certain information from my son—

KIT. No, you don't, Father. I'll have my say first. It's just this, Mrs. Fairfield—

RECTOR [*fussed*]. Christopher? Christopher?

KIT [*He is very much in earnest and he addresses himself solely to* MARGARET]. I want you to know that it is nothing to do with me, Mrs. Fairfield. I don't agree with my father. [*Confidentially.*] You wouldn't think it but I never do.

RECTOR. Christopher?

KIT [*ignoring him*]. And it was only coming up the drive that he sprung on me why he wanted to see you, or I wouldn't have come—

MARGARET [*liking him*]. I think Sydney would have been sorry, Kit.

KIT [*with a touch of his father's manner*]. Yes, well, Sydney and I have talked it over—and I know I'm going into the church myself—but I think he's all wrong, Mrs. Fairfield. [*Uncon-*

scious of plagiarism.] I'm not nineteenth century.

[*But* SYDNEY *giggles.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD. Rector, what's the matter with the young man?

KIT [*forging ahead*]. You see, I'm pretty keen about Sydney, and so, naturally, I'm pretty keen about you, Mrs. Fairfield.

RECTOR. Miss Fairfield, I'm without words.

KIT [*burdened*]. —and I just wanted to tell you that I can't tell you what I think of my father over this business. It makes me wild.

SYDNEY. Kit, you'd better shut up.

KIT [*turning to* SYDNEY]. Well, I only wanted her to understand that I'm not responsible for my father — that he's not my own choice, if you know what I mean. [*They talk aside.*]

RECTOR. His mother's right hand! I don't know what's come over him.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. A pretty face, Rector!

RECTOR. Ah! the very point! I shall be glad to see you alone, Mrs. Fairfield — not you, of course, Miss Fairfield, but — er —

[*He glances at* KIT *and* SYDNEY.]

MARGARET [*resignedly*]. Sydney, have you shown Kit all your presents?

SYDNEY [*reluctantly taking the hint, but continuing the conversation as they go out*]. What did you let him come for? Oh, you're no good!

[*The door bangs behind them.*]

MARGARET [*half smiling*]. Well, Mr. Pumphrey. I suppose it's about Sydney and Kit?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield, until last night we encouraged, we were gratified —

MARGARET. Last night? Oh, the dance!

RECTOR. I sat up for my son until three fifteen of Christmas morning. His excuse was your daughter —

MARGARET [*with dignity*]. Do you take objection to Sydney, Mr. Pumphrey?

RECTOR. Now, my dear lady, you mustn't misunderstand me —

MARGARET [*quietly*]. To me, then?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield, I beg — But in the course of a slight — er — altercation between Christopher and myself it transpired —

MARGARET [*she had been prepared for it*]. I see, It's her father —

RECTOR. I am grieved — grieved for you.

MARGARET. But his illness was no secret.

RECTOR. My heart, Mrs. Fairfield, and Mrs. Pumphrey's heart has gone out to you in your affliction. When the light of reason —

MARGARET. Then you did know. *Then* I don't follow.

RECTOR. But according to Christopher —

MARGARET. Well?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield, is your husband alive or dead?

MARGARET. My former husband is alive.

RECTOR [*with a half deprecatory, half triumphant gesture*]. Out of your own mouth, Mrs. Fairfield —

MARGARET [*bewildered*]. But you say you knew he was insane?

RECTOR. But I didn't know he was alive.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*irritated*]. Don't be so foolish, Margaret. It's not the insanity, it's the divorce.

RECTOR. When I realized that I had been within a week of re-marrying a divorced person —

MARGARET [*coldly*]. Why didn't you go to Mr. Meredith?

RECTOR. Mr. Meredith is — er — a difficult man to — er — approach. I felt that an appeal to your feelings, as a Christian, as a mother —

MARGARET. You mean you'll prevent Kit marrying Sydney —

RECTOR. It depends on you, Mrs. Fairfield. I won't let him marry the child of a woman who remarries while her husband is alive.

MARGARET. But the church allows it?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*correcting her*]. Winks at it, Margaret.

RECTOR [*with dignity*]. "Winks" is hardly the word —

MARGARET. Then what word would you use, Mr. Pumphrey?

RECTOR. I am not concerned with words.

MARGARET. But I want to know. I care about my church. It lets me and it doesn't let me — what does it mean?

RECTOR [*much moved*]. I am not concerned with meanings, Mrs. Fairfield. I am concerned with my own conscience.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Margaret — you've no business to upset the Rector. Why don't you tell him that the situation has changed?

MARGARET. Nothing has changed.

RECTOR. Changed?

MISS FAIRFIELD. My nephew has recovered — returned. He's in the house now.

RECTOR. Providence! It's providence! [*With enthusiasm.*] I never knew anything like providence. Changed indeed, Miss Fairfield! My objection goes. Dear little Sydney! Ah, Mrs. Fairfield, in a year you and your husband will look back on this — episode as on a dream — a bad dream —

MARGARET [*stonily*]. I have no husband.

RECTOR. Ah! the re-marriage — a mere formality —

MISS FAIRFIELD. Simpler still — the decree can be rescinded.

MARGARET [*stunned*]. Aunt Hester, knowing his history, knowing mine, is it possible that you expect me to go back to him?

MISS FAIRFIELD. He's come back to you.

RECTOR. A wife's duty —

MARGARET [*slowly*]. I think you're wicked. I think you're both wicked.

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Control yourself, Margaret!

MARGARET [*with a touch of wildness in her manner*]. You — do you love your wife?

RECTOR. Mrs. Fairfield!

MARGARET. Do you?

RECTOR. Mrs. Pumphrey and I — most attached —

MARGARET. Suppose you weren't. Think of it — to want so desperately to feel — and to feel nothing. Do you know what it means to dread a person who loves you? To stiffen at the look in their eyes? To pity and — shudder? You should not judge.

[HILARY, *unseen, opens the door and shuts it again quickly.*]

RECTOR. I — I —

MISS FAIRFIELD. There it is, you see, Rector! She doesn't care *what* she says.

[DR. ALLIOT *enters.*]

DR. ALLIOT [*gravely, holding the door behind him*]. Margaret, my child — [*He sees the others and his voice changes.*] Hullo, Pumphrey! You here still? Well, well — you're cutting it fine.

RECTOR. The service!

[*He pulls out his watch, stricken.*]

DR. ALLIOT. I'll run you down there if you'll wait a minute. [*To* MARGARET, *privately, poking a wise forefinger.*] What you want, my child, is a good cry and a cup of tea.

RECTOR [*coming up to* MARGARET *stiffly*]. Good-day, Mrs. Fairfield! You will not — reconsider — ?

MARGARET. I will not.

RECTOR. I regret — I regret — [*To* MISS FAIRFIELD.] My dear lady, you have my sympathy. I think I left my hat —

[MISS FAIRFIELD *escorts him into the hall.*]

DR. ALLIOT. Hilary's coming home with me, Margaret. He wants a word with you first. Can you manage that?

MARGARET. Of course.

DR. ALLIOT [*abruptly*]. Where's Meredith?

MARGARET [*eagerly*]. He's coming. He's taking me away.

DR. ALLIOT. Good. The sooner the better.

RECTOR [*reappearing at the door*]. Dr. Alliot — it now wants seven minutes to the half.

DR. ALLIOT. Coming! Coming! See now — you can be gentle with him —

MARGARET. Of course.

DR. ALLIOT [*with a keen look at her*]. Nor yet too gentle. Well, well, God be with you, child! [*He trots out.*]

[HILARY *comes in, hesitating. If he is without dignity, he is, nevertheless, too much like a hectored, forlorn child to be ludicrous.*]

HILARY. Have they gone? [*Reassuring her.*] It's all right. I'm going too. [*He waits for her to answer. She says nothing.*] I'm going. I've got to, I see that. He's made me see.

MARGARET. Dr. Alliot?

HILARY. I'm going to stay with him till I can look round. He's going to make it right with that place.

MARGARET. I'm glad you've got a good friend, Hilary.

HILARY. Yes, he's a good chap. He talked to me. He's made me see. [*He comes a little closer.*] He says — and I do see — It's too late, of course — [*his look at her is a petition, but she makes no sign*] isn't it? [*He comes nearer.*] Yes — it's too late. It wouldn't be fair — to ask you — [*again the look*] would it?

MARGARET [*imploringly*]. Oh, Hilary, Hilary!

HILARY [*encouraged to come closer*]. No woman could be expected — you couldn't be expected — [*she makes no sign*] could you? [*Repeating his lesson.*] It's what he says — you've made a new life for yourself — [*he waits*] haven't you? There's no room in it — for me — is there? [*He is close to her. She does not move.*] So it's just a case of — saying good-bye and going, because — because — I quite see — there's no chance — [*Suddenly he throws himself down beside her, catching at her hands, clinging to her knees.*] Oh! Meg, Meg, Meg! isn't there just a chance?

MARGARET [*faintly*]. Hilary, I can't stand it.

HILARY [*and from now to the end of the scene he is at full pelt, tumbling over his words, frantic*]. Yes, but listen to me! Listen to me! You don't listen. Listen to me! I've been alone so long —

MARGARET. Gray! Gray! Why don't you come?

HILARY. I'll not trouble you. I'll not get in your way — but — don't leave me all alone. Give me something — the rustle of your dress, the cushion where you've lain — your voice about the house. You can't deny me such little things, that you give your servant and your dog.

MARGARET. It's madness —

HILARY. It's naked need!

MARGARET. What good should I be to you? I don't love you, Hilary — poor Hilary. I love him. I never think of anything but him.

HILARY. But it's me you married. You promised — you promised — better or worse — in sickness in health — You can't go back on your promise.

MARGARET. It isn't fair.

HILARY. Anything's fair! You don't know what misery means.

MARGARET. I'm learning.

HILARY. But you don't *know*. You couldn't leave me to it if you knew. Why, I've never known you hurt a creature in all your life! Remember the rat-hunts in the barn, the way we used to chaff you? and the starling? and the kitten you found? Why, I've seen you step aside for a little creeping green thing on the path. You've never hurt anything. Then how can you hurt me so? You can't have changed since yesterday —

MARGARET [*in despairing protest*]. It's half my life ago —

HILARY. It's yesterday, it's yesterday!

MARGARET [*with the fleeting courage of a half caught bird*]. Yes, it *is* yesterday. It's how you took me — yesterday — and now you're doing it again!

HILARY [*catching at the hope of it*]. Am I? Am I? Is it yesterday? yesterday come back again?

MARGARET [*in the toils*]. No — no! Hilary, I can't!

HILARY [*at white heat*]. No, you can't. You can't leave me. You can't do it to me. You can't drive me out — the wilderness — alone — alone — alone. You can't do it, Meg — you can't do it — you can't!

MARGARET [*beaten*]. I suppose — I can't.

HILARY. You — you'll stay with me? [*Breaking down utterly.*] Oh, God bless

you, Meg, God bless you, God bless you—

[*She resigns her hands to him while she sits, flattened against the back of her chair, quivering a little, like a crucified moth.*]

MARGARET [*puzzling it out*]. You mean—God help me?

CURTAIN

ACT III

[*The scene is the same as in Act I.* MISS FAIRFIELD *sits reading.* SYDNEY *is fidgeting about the room.* BASSETT *comes in and begins to lay the cloth.* KIT, *who enters unseen behind her, sees* MISS FAIRFIELD *and makes hastily up the stairs on tip-toe.*]

SYDNEY [*turning*]. Oh, Bassett, isn't it rather early for tea? Lunch was so late.

BASSETT [*desisting*]. Oh, very well, miss.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Now, Sydney! Always trying to upset things! I'm more than ready for my tea. Bring it in at once, Bassett.

BASSETT. Very well, ma'am!

SYDNEY. Auntie, I know Mother won't want to be disturbed.

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's high time she was. Talk! Talk! No consideration. She'll tire Hilary out.

[*She goes towards the drawing-room.*]

SYDNEY [*worried*]. Auntie, I think—

MISS FAIRFIELD. Then you shouldn't!

[*She goes out.*]

BASSETT. Shall I bring in tea, Miss Sydney?

SYDNEY [*with a twinkle*]. I think we'll wait half an hour.

BASSETT [*with an answering twinkle*]. Very well, miss.

SYDNEY. Oh—Bassett—tell Mr. Kit that—er—that the coast's clear.

BASSETT. He didn't stay out with us, Miss. Him and the puppy together was a bit too much for cook, with the turkey on her hands. [*Looking round.*] He's here somewhere, miss. [*She goes out.*]

SYDNEY [*addressing space*]. Kit, you idiot, come out!

KIT [*appearing at the head of the stairs*]. I spend half my life dodging your aunt. [*As he runs downstairs he rakes a bunch of mistletoe from the top of a picture.*] She spoilt the whole effect this morning, but now—

[*He advances on* SYDNEY.]

SYDNEY [*enjoying herself*]. What do you want now?

KIT [*chanting*]. "The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall!"—

SYDNEY [*eluding him*]. Shut up, Kit!

[*They dodge and scuffle like two puppies till the drawing-room door opens, letting in the sound of voices.*]

KIT. Sst!

[*He dashes up the stairs and comes down again much more soberly as* SYDNEY *says over her shoulder*—]

SYDNEY. It's only Mother.

[MARGARET *comes dragging into the room, shutting the door behind her.*]

SYDNEY [*the laughter dying out of her*]. Oh, Mother, how white you look!

MARGARET. Has Kit gone?

SYDNEY. No, but I can get rid of him if you want me to.

MARGARET. I want him to wait. I want him to take a letter for me to Gray.

SYDNEY. Do you want Gray to come here?

MARGARET. I want him not to come here.

SYDNEY. Oh, I see, not till after Father's gone.

MARGARET. He's not going.

SYDNEY. Mother!

[MARGARET *looks at her with twitching lips.*]

SYDNEY. Mother, you haven't—

MARGARET. I can't talk to you now, Sydney.

SYDNEY. But Mother—

MARGARET. Please.

SYDNEY. But Mother—

MARGARET. Ask Kit to wait a few minutes.

SYDNEY. But—

[MARGARET *goes into the inner room and sits down to write at a little*

desk near the window. Her back is turned to them and she is soon absorbed in her letter. SYDNEY *stands deep in thought.*]

KIT [*at the foot of the stairs*]. All serene?

[SYDNEY *makes no answer.* KIT *prances up behind her with the bunch of mistletoe.*]

KIT [*repeating his success*]. "The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall!"

SYDNEY [*violently*]. Oh, for God's sake, stop it!

KIT [*quenched*]. What's the row?

SYDNEY. You never know when to stop.

KIT. Well, you needn't snap out at a person —

SYDNEY [*impulsively*]. Sorry! Oh, sorry, old man! I'm jumpy to-day.

KIT [*chaffing her*]. Nervy old thing!

SYDNEY [*stricken*]. I — I suppose I am.

KIT. One minute you're as nice as pie, and then you fizz up like a seidlitz powder, all about nothing.

SYDNEY. All about nothing. Sorry, my old Kit, sorry! [*She flings herself down on the sofa. Then with an effort.*] Come and talk. What's the news?

KIT. I told you it all this morning. What's your's?

SYDNEY. I like your's better. How's the pamphlet going?

KIT. Nearly done. I put in all your stuff.

SYDNEY [*absently*]. Good.

KIT. Though you know, I don't agree with it. What I feel is — you're not listening.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. Kit, talking of that paper — I read somewhere — suppose now — is it true it can skip a generation?

KIT. It? What?

SYDNEY. Oh — any illness. Consumption or — well, say insanity. Suppose — *you,* for instance — suppose you were a queer family — a little, you know. Say your mother or your father was queer — and you weren't. You were perfectly fit, you understand, perfectly fit —

KIT. Well?

SYDNEY. What about the children?

KIT. I wouldn't risk it. Thank the Lord your father's only shell-shock.

SYDNEY. Why?

KIT. You can't pass on shell-shock.

SYDNEY. Then you can pass on insanity — even if you're fit yourself?

KIT. Of course you can.

SYDNEY. It would be very wicked, wouldn't it — to children? Oh, it would be wicked. I suppose when people are in love they don't think.

KIT. Won't think.

SYDNEY. But isn't there a school that says there's no such thing as heredity?

KIT. Well, all I know is I wouldn't risk it.

SYDNEY. It — it's hard on people.

KIT. My word, yes. They say that's why old Alliot never married.

SYDNEY [*high and mightily*]. Oh, village gossip.

KIT [*apologetically*]. Well, you know what the matter is.

SYDNEY [*abandoning her dignity*]. Who was it, Kit?

KIT. Old Miss Robson.

SYDNEY. Rot!

KIT. Fact.

SYDNEY. But she's all right.

KIT. Had a game sister.

SYDNEY. Of course! I just remember her. She used to scare me.

KIT. Oh, it must be true. They're such tremendous pals still.

SYDNEY. Poor old things!

KIT. Rotten for her.

SYDNEY. Rottener for him! What did she go on being pals with him for?

KIT. Why shouldn't she?

SYDNEY. Well it stopped him marrying anyone else. She oughtn't to have let him.

KIT. You can't stop a person being fond of you.

SYDNEY. When it's a man you can.

KIT. My dear girl, you don't know what you're talking about.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if a girl finds out that it's not right for her to marry a man, it's up to her to choke him off.

KIT. Rot!

SYDNEY. Well, I think so.

KIT. Couldn't be done.

SYDNEY. Couldn't it just?

KIT. Any man would see through it.

SYDNEY. As if any man ever saw through anything! As if I couldn't choke you off in five minutes if I wanted to!

KIT. I'd like to see you try!

SYDNEY. Would you?

KIT. My dear girl, we're not all fools where women are concerned.

SYDNEY. I admire your air of conviction.

KIT. Don't be clever-clever, old thing. Be— [*His arm slips round her.*]

SYDNEY [*edging away*]. Don't.

KIT. [*he glances round hastily at* MARGARET, *but she is deep in writing*]. Why not?

SYDNEY [*deliberately*]. I hate being pawed. [*A pause.*]

KIT. Look here, Sydney, d'you call this a way of spending Christmas afternoon?

SYDNEY [*her lip quivering*]. It isn't much of a way, is it?

KIT. Well then, old thing!

[*Again the arm.*]

SYDNEY [*icily*]. I told you to leave me alone.

KIT [*rising, huffed*]. Oh, well, if you can't be decent, I'm going.

SYDNEY [*sweetly*]. Counter attraction?

KIT [*wheeling round on her*]. Now, my dear old thing, look here. I know it's only a sort of way you've got into; but when you say—"men!"—with a sort of sneer, and "other attractions"—like that, in that voice, it just sounds cheap. I hate it. It's not like you. I wish you wouldn't.

SYDNEY. Dear me!

KIT. Now I suppose you're annoyed.

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I'm only amused.

KIT [*heavily*]. There's nothing amusing about me, Sydney. I'm in earnest.

SYDNEY. I'm sure you are. You got out of answering an innocent little question quite neatly. It looks like practice.

KIT [*harried*]. Now, look here, Sydney, I swear to you—

SYDNEY [*like the ghost in Hamlet*]. Swear!

KIT. If you're thinking of Alice Hewitt, I've only met her four times.

SYDNEY. Oh, so her name's Alice!

KIT. Didn't you know?

SYDNEY. Never heard of her till this minute.

KIT. Then what on earth have you been driving at.

SYDNEY. Trying an experiment.

KIT. If it's because you're jealous—

SYDNEY. Jealous! Jealous of a—What color are her eyes?

KIT [*carelessly*]. How'd I know?

SYDNEY [*with a sudden spurt of suspicion*]. Kit! What color are mine?

KIT [*helplessly*]. Oh, er—oh—

SYDNEY [*terribly*]. Kit! What color are mine? [*Relenting*]. Look at my frock, you donkey! What do you suppose I wear blue for? So Alice has got blue eyes!

KIT. How do you know?

SYDNEY. I know you, Kit. You're conservative.

KIT. As a matter of fact, she isn't unlike you. That's what made me talk to her.

SYDNEY. Oh, you've talked to her.

KIT [*warming*]. Oh, yes—quite a lot. She's a friend of my sister's.

SYDNEY. She always is.

KIT. What d'you mean—"she always is"? I tell you I've only met her four times. I can't make you out.

SYDNEY. No?

KIT. I wish I could make you out.

SYDNEY [*an ache in her voice*]. Oh, I wish you could.

KIT [*responding instantly*]. I say, old thing, is anything really the matter?

SYDNEY [*with a glance at* MARGARET]. I'm worried.

KIT. Oh, that! Yes, it's beastly for your mother.

SYDNEY. Oh, it's not that. At least—

KIT. What?

SYDNEY [*lightly*]. Oh, I don't know.

KIT [*puzzled*]. Can't you tell me?

SYDNEY. No, old man.

KIT [*as in Act I*]. But—look here—marriage has got to be a sort of mutual show, hasn't it? Confidence, and all that?

[SYDNEY *goes off into a peal of laughter.*]

KIT. What's the matter now?

SYDNEY. Do you preach this sort of sermon to Alice?

KIT. Sydney — that's — that's rude — that's — that's —

SYDNEY. Take time, darling!

KIT. You're being simply insulting.

SYDNEY. Too bad! I should go and tell Alice.

KIT. Damn Alice!

SYDNEY. Oh, no, Kit, she's got blue eyes.

KIT [*storming*]. Look here, what's up?

SYDNEY. Nix.

KIT. Have you really got your back up? What's the matter with you, Sydney?

SYDNEY. D'you want to know?

KIT [*with a certain dignity*]. I think I'd better.

SYDNEY. Well, it's [*yawning*] "jam to-morrow, jam yesterday, but — " Surely you know how it ends?

KIT. I don't. And I don't want to.

SYDNEY [*drearily*]. "But never jam to-day."

KIT [*startled*]. Why, Sydney!

SYDNEY [*recovering herself, lightly*]. D'you know what that's out of?

KIT. No.

SYDNEY [*mischievously*]. You ought to — "Alice" —

[KIT *makes a furious gesture.*]

SYDNEY [*appeasing him*]. No, no, no! "Alice through the Looking-glass!" [*More soberly.*] I can't help it, Kit. When I look in the looking-glass I see — Alice.

KIT. Once and for all, Sydney, will you shut up about Alice?

SYDNEY. Can't. It's her jam to-day.

KIT. I wish you'd talk sense for a change.

SYDNEY. But I am. I'm conveying to you as nicely and tactfully as possible that I'm —

KIT [*apprehensive at last*]. What, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Tired of jam.

KIT [*heavily*]. D'you mean you're tired of me?

SYDNEY. That would be putting it crudely.

KIT. What's got into you? I don't know you.

SYDNEY. P'raps you're beginning to.

KIT. But what have I done?

SYDNEY [*flaring effectively*]. Well, for one thing you shouldn't have told your father we were engaged. What girl, do you suppose, would stand it? You ask Alice.

KIT [*flaring in reality*]. If you're not jolly careful I will.

SYDNEY [*egging him on*]. Good for you!

KIT [*furious*]. And if I do I'll ask her more than that.

SYDNEY [*clapping her hands*]. I should go and do it now, if I were you. Strike while the iron's hot.

KIT. You're mad!

SYDNEY [*with intense bitterness*]. Yes, I suppose that's the right word to fling at me.

KIT [*between injury and distress*]. I never meant that. You're twisting the words in my mouth. You're just picking a quarrel.

SYDNEY [*lazily*]. Well, what's one to do with a little boy who won't take his medicine? I tried to give it you in jam.

KIT [*curtly*]. You want me to go?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. For good?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. Honest?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. Right.

[*He turns from her and goes out.*]

MARGARET [*looking up*]. Was that Kit? Sydney, don't let him go.

SYDNEY. Kit! Ki-it!

KIT [*returning joyfully*]. Yes! Yes, old thing?

SYDNEY [*impassively*]. Mother wants you.

MARGARET. Oh, Kit — would you take this for me? It's for Mr. Meredith. I expect you'll meet him, but if not, I want you to take it on. At once, Kit.

KIT. Right, Mrs. Fairfield!

MARGARET [*detaining him*]. What's the matter, Kit?

KIT [*his head up*]. Nothing, Mrs. Fairfield.

SYDNEY. Mother, Kit's got to go.

KIT [*resentfully*]. It's all right. I'm going. You needn't worry.

MARGARET [*humorously, washing her hands of them*]. Oh, you two!

[*She turns away from them and stands, her arm on the mantelpiece, staring into the fire.* KIT *marches to the door.*]

SYDNEY [*in spite of herself, softly*]. Kit!

KIT [*quickly*]. Yes?

SYDNEY [*recovering herself, impishly*]. You'll give her my love?

KIT. You're a beast, Sydney Fairfield!

[*He goes out with a slam.*]

SYDNEY [*in a changed voice*]. You'll give her *my* love. [*Running to the door.*] Kit!

[*The door opens again, but it is* GRAY MEREDITH *who comes in.*]

GRAY. Sydney, what's wrong with Kit? He went past me like a gust of wind.

MARGARET [*coming up to them*]. He didn't give you my note?

GRAY. He never looked at me. What note?

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. Aren't you ready? Why aren't you dressed?

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. You must be quick, dearest.

MARGARET. I—

[*She sways where she stands.*]

[GRAY *goes to her, and half clinging to him, half repulsing him, she sits down with her arm on the table and her head on her arm.*]

GRAY. Of course! Worn out! You should have come an hour ago.

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Never mind that now. Sydney, get your mother's wraps.

MARGARET [*agitated*]. Sydney—wait—no.

GRAY. Warm things. It's bitter, driving.

SYDNEY [*uncertainly*]. Gray I think—

GRAY. Get them, please.

[*After a tiny pause and look at him* SYDNEY *obeys. You see her go upstairs and disappear along the gallery.*]

GRAY [*solicitous*]. I was afraid it would come hard on you. Has he—? But you can tell me all that later.

MARGARET. I must tell it you now.

GRAY. Be quick, then. We've got a fifty mile drive before us.

MARGARET [*not looking at him*]. I—I'm not coming.

GRAY [*smiling*]. Not? There, sit quiet a moment. My dear—my dear heart—you're all to pieces.

MARGARET. I'm not coming.

GRAY [*checking what he takes for hysteria*]. Margaret—Margaret—

MARGARET. I'm not coming. It's Hilary.

GRAY. What? Collapsed again? I thought as much.

MARGARET. I—

GRAY. Tragic! But—it simplifies his problem, poor devil. Has Alliot charge of him?

MARGARET. No, no. It's not that. He's not ill. He's well. That's it. He's well—and—he won't let me go.

GRAY. He won't, won't he?

[*He turns from her.*]

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. To settle this matter. Where is he?

MARGARET. Leave him alone. It's me you must punish. I've made up my mind. Oh, how am I to tell you? He convinced me. He—cried, Gray. [*Then, as* GRAY *makes a quick gesture.*] You mustn't sneer. You must understand. He's so unhappy. And there's Sydney to think of. And Gray, he won't marry us.

GRAY. What's that?

MARGARET. The Rector. He's been here.

GRAY [*furious*]. My God, why wasn't I?

MARGARET. And Aunt Hester—she made it worse. [*Despairingly.*] You see what it is—they all think I'm wicked.

GRAY. Damned insolence!

MARGARET. But it's not them—it's Hilary. I did fight them. I can't fight Hilary. I see it. It's my own fault. I ought never to have let myself care for you.

GRAY. Talk sense.

MARGARET. But there it is. It's too much for me. I've got to stay with him.

GRAY [*for the first time taking her seriously*]. Say that again Margaret, if you dare —

MARGARET. I've got to — stay — [*With a sharp crying note in her voice.*] Gray, Gray, don't look at me like that!

[*He turns abruptly away from her and walks across to the hearth. He stands a moment, deep in thought, takes out and lights a cigarette, realizes what he is doing, and with an exclamation flings it into the fire. Then he comes to* MARGARET, *who has not moved.*]

GRAY [*very quietly*]. This — this is rather an extraordinary statement, isn't it?

MARGARET [*shrinking*]. Don't use — that tone.

GRAY. I am being as patient as I can. But — it's not easy.

MARGARET. Easy — ?

GRAY. Do you mind telling me exactly what you mean?

MARGARET. I can't talk. You know I'm not clever. I'm trying to do what's right —

GRAY. Then shall I tell you?

[MARGARET *makes a little quick movement with her hands, but she says nothing.*]

GRAY [*watching her keenly while he speaks*]. You mean that you've made a mistake —

MARGARET [*misunderstanding*]. Yes.

GRAY. —that the last five years goes for nothing — that you don't care for me.

MARGARET. Gray!

GRAY. Wait. That you've never cared for me — that you don't want to marry me —

MARGARET. How can you say these things to me?

GRAY. But aren't they true?

MARGARET. You know — you know they're not true.

GRAY. Then what do you mean when you say, "I won't come?"

MARGARET. I mean — Hilary. I've got to put him first because — because he's weak. You — you're strong.

GRAY. Not strong enough to do without my birthright. I want my wife and my children. I've waited a long while for you. Now you must come.

[SYDNEY *comes down the stairs, a red furred cloak over her arm. She pauses a few steps from the bottom, afraid to break in on them.*]

MARGARET. If Hilary's left alone he'll go mad again.

GRAY. Margaret — come.

MARGARET. How can I?

GRAY. Margaret, my own heart — come.

MARGARET. You oughtn't to torture me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY [*darkening*]. Are you coming with me? I sha'n't ask it again.

MARGARET. Oh, God — You hear him! What am I to do?

[SYDNEY *comes down another step.*]

GRAY. Why, you're to do as you choose. I sha'n't force you. I'm not your turn-key. I'm not your beggar. We're free people, you and I. It's for you to say if you'll keep your — conscience, do you call it? — and lose —

MARGARET. I've lost what I love. There's no more to lose.

GRAY. You sing as sweetly as a toy nightingale. Almost I'd think you were real.

MARGARET [*wounded*]. I don't know what you mean.

GRAY. "What you love!" You don't know the meaning of the notes you use.

MARGARET [*very white, but her voice is steady*]. Don't deceive yourself. I love you. I ache and faint for you. I starve —

SYDNEY [*appalled, whispering*]. What is it? I don't know her.

MARGARET. I'm withering without you like cut grass in the sun. I love you. I love you. Can't you see how it is with me? But —

GRAY. There's no "but" in love.

MARGARET. What is it in me? There's a thing I can't do. I can't see such pain.

GRAY [*hoarsely*]. Do you think *I* can't suffer?

MARGARET. I *am* you. But he — he's so defenceless. It's vivisection — like cutting a dumb beast about to make me well. I can't do it. I'd rather die of my cancer.

GRAY [*the storm breaking*]. Die then — you fool — you fool!!

[SYDNEY *descends another step. The cloak slides from her hands on to the baluster.*]

GRAY [*without expression*]. Good-bye.

MARGARET [*blindly*]. Forgive —

GRAY. How can I?

MARGARET. I would you —

GRAY. D'you think I bear you malice? It's not I. Why, to deny me, that's a little thing. I'll not go under because you're faithless. But what you're doing is the sin without forgiveness. You're denying — not me — but life. You're denying the spirit of life. You're denying — you're denying your mate.

SYDNEY [*strung up to breaking point*]. Mother, you shall not.

MARGARET [*as they both turn*]. Sydney!

SYDNEY [*coming down to them*]. I tell you — I tell you, you shall not.

MARGARET [*sitting down, with a listless gesture*]. I must. There's no way out.

SYDNEY. There is. For *you* there is. I've thought it all along, and now I know. Father — he's my job, not yours.

MARGARET [*with a last flicker of passion*]. D'you think I'll make a scapegoat of my own child?

SYDNEY [*sternly*]. Can you help it? I'm his child. [*She throws herself down beside her.*] Mother! Mother darling, don't you see? You're no good to him. You're scared of him. But I'm his own flesh and blood. I know how he feels. I'll make him happier than you can. Be glad for me. Be glad I'm wanted somewhere.

MARGARET [*struggling against the hope that is flooding her*]. But Kit, Sydney — Kit?

SYDNEY [*with a queer little laugh that ends, though it does not begin, quite naturally*]. Bless him, I'll be dancing at his wedding in six months.

MARGARET. But all you ought to have —

SYDNEY [*jumping up flippantly*]. Oh, I'm off getting married. I'm going to have a career.

MARGARET. — the love — the children —

SYDNEY [*strained*]. No children for me, Mother. No children for me. I've lost my chance for ever.

MARGARET [*weakly*]. No — no —

SYDNEY [*smiling down at her*]. But you — you take it. I give it to you.

MARGARET. But —

SYDNEY [*dominant*]. What's the use of arguing? I've made up my mind.

MARGARET. But if your father —

SYDNEY [*at the end of her endurance*]. Go away, Mother. Go away quickly. This is my job, not yours.

[*She turns abruptly from them to the window, and stands staring out into the darkening garden.*]

MARGARET [*dazed*]. So — so — [*She sways, hesitating, unbelieving, like a bird at the open door of its cage.*] So — I can come.

[GRAY *makes no answer.*]

MARGARET [*with a new full note in her voice*]. Gray, I can come.

GRAY [*without moving*]. Can you, Margaret?

MARGARET [*in heaven*]. I can come.

GRAY [*impassively*]. Are you sure?

MARGARET [*in quick alarm*]. What do you mean?

GRAY [*stonily*]. Why, you could deny me. You've chopped and changed. I want proof that you've still a right to come.

MARGARET [*like a child*]. You're angry with me?

GRAY. No.

MARGARET. You're angry with me.

GRAY. I want proof.

MARGARET. I get frightened. I'm made so. Always I've been afraid — of Hilary — of everyone — of life. But now — you — you're angry, you're so angry, you're very angry with me — and I — [*She goes steadily across the room to him. He makes no movement.*] I'm not afraid. [*She puts up her hands,*

and drawing him down to her kisses him on the mouth.] Is that proof?

GRAY [*Quietly*]. Proof enough. Come.

[*He takes the cloak and throws it round her. They go out together. As* SYDNEY, *forgotten, stands looking after them,* BASSETT *enters with the tea-tray. She puts it down on the table and turns up the lights.*]

BASSETT. Is the gentleman staying to tea, miss?

SYDNEY [*correcting her*]. Mr. Fairfield. It's my father, Bassett.

BASSETT. We thought so, miss.

SYDNEY [*smiling faintly*]. Did you, Bassett?

BASSETT. He's got your way, miss! Quick-like! [*She opens the drawing-room door.*] Tea's ready, ma'am.

[*Outside the motor drives away.*]

MISS FAIRFIELD [*entering with* HILARY]. Tea's very late. [BASSETT *goes out.*]

HILARY. I thought I heard the sound of a car. [*Suspiciously.*] Where's your mother?

SYDNEY. She's gone away.

HILARY [*stricken*]. Gone?

SYDNEY. Gone away for good.

HILARY. Where?

SYDNEY. Out of our lives.

HILARY. With — ?

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Out of our lives.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*furiously*]. This is your doing, Sydney.

HILARY [*dazed*]. Gone. Everything gone.

SYDNEY. I'm not gone.

HILARY. But that boy — ?

SYDNEY. That's done with.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You've jilted him?

SYDNEY. Yes.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Like mother, like daughter.

SYDNEY. Just so.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I pray you get your punishment.

SYDNEY. Your prayers will surely be answered, Auntie.

HILARY [*slowly*]. It was a cruel thing to do.

SYDNEY. He'll get over it. Men — they're not like us.

HILARY [*timidly*]. You loved him?

SYDNEY. What's that to anyone but me?

HILARY [*peering at her*]. You're crying.

SYDNEY. I'm not.

HILARY. You love him?

SYDNEY. I suppose so.

HILARY. Then why? Then why?

SYDNEY. We're in the same boat, Father.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Yes, that's the way they talk now, Hilary. They know too much, the young women. It upsets everything.

[HILARY *sits down on the sofa.*]

HILARY [*broken*]. I don't see ahead. I don't see what's to become of me. There's no one.

SYDNEY. There's me.

HILARY [*not looking at her*]. I should think you hate me.

SYDNEY. I need you just as badly as you need me.

HILARY [*fiercely*]. It's your damn-clever doing that she went. D'you think I can't hate you?

SYDNEY [*close to him*]. No, no Father, you want me too much. We'll make a good job of it yet.

HILARY [*his head in his hands*]. What job?

SYDNEY [*petting him, coaxing him, loving him, her hands quieting his twitching hands, her strong will already controlling him*]. Living. I've got such plans already, Father — Father dear. We'll do things. We'll have a good time somehow, you and I — you and I. Did you know you'd got a clever daughter? Writing — painting — acting! We'll go on tour together. We'll make a lot of money. We'll have a cottage somewhere. You see, I'll make it up to you. I'll make you proud of me.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*surveying them*]. Proud of her! D'you see, Hilary? That's all she thinks of — self — self — self! Money, ambition — and sends that poor boy away. A parson's son! Not good enough for her, that's what it is. She's like the rest of the young women. Hard as nails! Hard as nails!

SYDNEY [*crying out*]. Don't you

listen to her, Father! Father, don't believe her! I'm not hard. I'm not hard.

[*His arm goes round her with a gesture, awkward, timid, yet fatherly.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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Getting Married and Preface to *Getting Married* (Bernard Shaw)
A Divorce (Paul Bourget)

QUESTIONS ON "A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT"

1. Is this a real problem play?
2. Does the play gain by the observance of the unities of time and place?
3. Characterize the Reverend Christopher Pumphrey. What qualities in common do you find in the rectors in the plays you have read?
4. How do you think Henry Arthur Jones would end the play?
5. Is Sydney's renunciation of marriage logical? Necessary?
6. Does Margaret solve her problem in the best way?

WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

William Somerset Maugham was born in Paris in 1874. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury; at Heidelberg University, where he studied medicine; and at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, where he served as interne and received his medical degree. Like John Keats he deserted surgery for a more seductive calling, literature, although he has been elected Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Member and Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. During the World War he was for a while a doctor in France and later a British secret agent in Russia and Switzerland. Since the war he has devoted himself exclusively to literature — novels, short stories, essays, and plays — and has traveled extensively. Although he maintains his home in France, he spends three months of each year in the United States, either in New York or Chicago, and has made various journeys to the Far East and the South Seas.

Of Human Bondage, one of the finest novels of our day, is, he tells us, a faithful record of the first thirty years of his life. *The Moon and Sixpence* is his most widely read novel. Like Galsworthy, Maugham has been able to write plays as excellent as his novels, a feat difficult of accomplishment, as the failure of Stevenson, Arnold Bennett, Booth Tarkington, and many other good novelists may bear witness. His first play, *Schiffbrüchig,* was written in German, and produced in Berlin in 1902. In 1908 he established a London record by having four plays performed concurrently. His best plays, all high comedies in the tradition of Farquhar, Sheridan, Wilde, Pinero, and Jones, are *Our Betters* (1917), *The Circle* (1921), *The Constant Wife* (1927), and *The Letter* (1927). It is not too much to say that Maugham at his best is at least the equal of his brilliant predecessors in the field of the high comedy.

No Restoration comedy of manners is more sparkling and witty than is *The Circle.* There is no incongruous melodramatic element as in the comedies of Wilde. There is no deference to the demands of conventional morality as in *The Liars* and other comedies of Henry Arthur Jones. In general, *The Circle* lacks the artificiality, the merely superficial brilliancy of most high comedies. There is a soundness to the play that makes it essentially a comedy of character. Here as elsewhere in Maugham's works we detect his contempt of the sentimental; in his efforts to avoid it he perhaps endows many of his characters with a cool rationality that the average human being does not possess. There is no mistaking Maugham's cynicism in *The Circle,* although it is not so marked as in *Our Betters.* In the latter play practically all the characters are interested only in ambition and social position, and do not hesitate to risk everything for these considerations. In *The Circle* Lady Kitty and Hughie are depicted with merciless completeness, and the inference is that the shoddiness of their lives is not so much the result of defiance of conventions as of the triviality of their own characters. Champion-Cheney is one of the most engaging and cynical personages in dramatic literature.

To offset the cynicism of the comedy there is an intellectual honesty and candor that is as wholesome as it is unusual. The Victorian dramatist would have made Elizabeth abandon her desertion of Arnold when faced with the example of Lady Kitty and Porteous; but Maugham is nearer the truth when he makes youth disregard the admonitions of age, and set forth to learn the lessons of life first-hand. The love scenes between Elizabeth and Teddie are sincere and ingenuous. Although *The Circle* ends with the laughter of Lady Kitty, Clive, and Porteous in a scene of exquisite dramatic irony, we lay the play aside sobered by the words of Porteous just before this last scene: " . . . I don't know that in life it matters so much what you do as what you are. No one can learn by the experience of another because no circumstances are quite the same. If we made rather a hash of things perhaps it was because we were rather trivial people. You can do anything in this world if you are prepared to take the consequences, and consequences depend on character."

THE CIRCLE
(1921)

BY

WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

CHARACTERS

CLIVE CHAMPION-CHENEY
ARNOLD CHAMPION-CHENEY, M. P.
LORD PORTEOUS
EDWARD LUTON
LADY CATHERINE CHAMPION-CHENEY
ELIZABETH
MRS. SHENSTONE

The action takes place at Aston-Adey, Arnold Champion-Cheney's house in Dorset.

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THE CIRCLE

ACT I

The Scene is a stately drawing-room at Aston-Adey, with fine pictures on the walls and Georgian furniture. Aston-Adey has been described, with many illustrations, in "Country Life." It is not a house, but a place. Its owner takes a great pride in it, and there is nothing in the room which is not of the period. Through the French windows at the back can be seen the beautiful gardens which are one of the features.

It is a fine summer morning.

[ARNOLD *comes in. He is a man of about thirty-five, tall and good-looking, fair, with a clean-cut, sensitive face. He has a look that is intellectual, but somewhat bloodless. He is very well dressed.*]

ARNOLD [*calling*]. Elizabeth! [*He goes to the window and calls again.*] Elizabeth!

[*He rings the bell. While he is waiting he gives a look round the room. He slightly alters the position of one of the chairs. He takes an ornament from the chimney-piece and blows the dust from it.*]

[*A* FOOTMAN *comes in.*]

ARNOLD. Oh, George! see if you can find Mrs. Cheney, and ask her if she'd be good enough to come here.

FOOTMAN. Very good, sir.

[*The* FOOTMAN *turns to go.*]

ARNOLD. Who is supposed to look after this room?

FOOTMAN. I don't know, sir.

ARNOLD. I wish when they dust they'd take care to replace the things exactly as they were before.

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir.

ARNOLD [*dismissing him*]. All right.

[*The* FOOTMAN *goes out.* ARNOLD *goes again to the window and calls.*]

ARNOLD. Elizabeth! [*He sees* MRS. SHENSTONE.] Oh, Anna, do you know where Elizabeth is?

[MRS. SHENSTONE *comes in from the garden. She is a woman of forty, pleasant and of elegant appearance.*]

ANNA. Isn't she playing tennis?

ARNOLD. No, I've been down to the tennis court. Something very tiresome has happened.

ANNA. Oh?

ARNOLD. I wonder where the deuce she is.

ANNA. When do you expect Lord Porteous and Lady Kitty?

ARNOLD. They're motoring down in time for luncheon.

ANNA. Are you sure you want me to be here? It's not too late yet, you know. I can have my things packed and catch a train for somewhere or other.

ARNOLD. No, of course we want you. It'll make it so much easier if there are people here. It was exceedingly kind of you to come.

ANNA. Oh, nonsense.

ARNOLD. And I think it was a good thing to have Teddie Luton down.

ANNA. He is so breezy, isn't he?

ARNOLD. Yes, that's his great asset. I don't know that he's very intelligent, but, you know, there are occasions when you want a bull in a china shop. I sent one of the servants to find Elizabeth.

ANNA. I daresay she's putting on her shoes. She and Teddie were going to have a single.

ARNOLD. It can't take all this time to change one's shoes.

ANNA [*with a smile*]. One can't change one's shoes without powdering one's nose, you know.

[ELIZABETH *comes in. She is a very pretty creature in the early twenties. She wears a light summer frock.*]

ARNOLD. My dear, I've been hunting for you everywhere. What *have* you been doing?

ELIZABETH. Nothing! I've been standing on my head.

ARNOLD. My father's here.

ELIZABETH [*startled*]. Where?

ARNOLD. At the cottage. He arrived last night.

ELIZABETH. Damn!

ARNOLD [*good-humoredly*]. I wish you wouldn't say that, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. If you're not going to say "Damn" when a thing's damnable, when are you going to say "Damn"!

ARNOLD. I should have thought you could say, "Oh, bother!" or something like that.

ELIZABETH. But that wouldn't express my sentiments. Besides, at that speech day when you were giving away the prizes you said there were no synonyms in the English language.

ANNA [*smiling*]. Oh, Elizabeth! it's very unfair to expect a politician to live in private up to the statements he makes in public.

ARNOLD. I'm always willing to stand by anything I've said. There *are* no synonyms in the English language.

ELIZABETH. In that case I shall be regretfully forced to continue to say "Damn" whenever I feel like it.

[EDWARD LUTON *shows himself at the window. He is an attractive youth in flannels.*]

TEDDIE. I say, what about this tennis?

ELIZABETH. Come in. We're having a scene.

TEDDIE [*entering*]. How splendid! What about?

ELIZABETH. The English language.

TEDDIE. Don't tell me you've been splitting your infinitives.

ARNOLD [*with the shadow of a frown*]. I wish you'd be serious, Elizabeth. The situation is none too pleasant.

ANNA. I think Teddie and I had better make ourselves scarce.

ELIZABETH. Nonsense! You're both in it. If there's going to be any unpleasantness we want your moral support. That's why we asked you to come.

TEDDIE. And I thought I'd been asked for my blue eyes.

ELIZABETH. Vain beast! And they happen to be brown.

TEDDIE. Is anything up?

ELIZABETH. Arnold's father arrived last night.

TEDDIE. Did he, by Jove! I thought he was in Paris.

ARNOLD. So did we all. He told me he'd be there for the next month.

ANNA. Have you seen him?

ARNOLD. No! he rang me up. It's a mercy he had a telephone put in the cottage. It would have been a pretty kettle of fish if he'd just walked in.

ELIZABETH. Did you tell him Lady Catherine was coming?

ARNOLD. Of course not. I was flabbergasted to know he was here. And then I thought we'd better talk it over first.

ELIZABETH. Is he coming along here?

ARNOLD. Yes. He suggested it, and I couldn't think of any excuse to prevent him.

TEDDIE. Couldn't you put the other people off?

ARNOLD. They're coming by car. They may be here any minute. It's too late to do that.

ELIZABETH. Besides, it would be beastly.

ARNOLD. I knew it was silly to have them here. Elizabeth insisted.

ELIZABETH. After all, she *is* your mother, Arnold.

ARNOLD. That meant precious little to her when she — went away. You can't imagine it means very much to me now.

ELIZABETH. It's thirty years ago. It seems so absurd to bear malice after all that time.

ARNOLD. I don't bear malice, but the fact remains that she did me the most irreparable harm. I can find no excuse for her.

ELIZABETH. Have you ever tried to?

ARNOLD. My dear Elizabeth, it's no good going over all that again. The facts are lamentably simple. She had a hus-

band who adored her, a wonderful position, all the money she could want, and a child of five. And she ran away with a married man.

ELIZABETH. Lady Porteous is not a very attractive woman, Arnold. [*To* ANNA.] Do you know her?

ANNA [*smiling*]. "Forbidding" is the word, I think.

ARNOLD. If you're going to make little jokes about it, I have nothing more to say.

ANNA. I'm sorry, Arnold.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps your mother couldn't help herself — if she was in love?

ARNOLD. And had no sense of honor, duty, or decency? Oh, yes, under those circumstances you can explain a great deal.

ELIZABETH. That's not a very pretty way to speak of your mother.

ARNOLD. I can't look on her as my mother.

ELIZABETH. What you can't get over is that she didn't think of you. Some of us are more mother and some of us more woman. It gives me a little thrill when I think that she loved that man so much. She sacrificed her name, her position, and her child to him.

ARNOLD. You really can't expect the said child to have any great affection for the mother who treated him like that.

ELIZABETH. No, I don't think I do. But I think it's a pity after all these years that you shouldn't be friends.

ARNOLD. I wonder if you realize what it was to grow up under the shadow of that horrible scandal. Everywhere, at school, and at Oxford, and afterwards in London, I was always the son of Lady Kitty Cheney. Oh, it was cruel, cruel!

ELIZABETH. Yes, I know, Arnold. It was beastly for you.

ARNOLD. It would have been bad enough if it had been an ordinary case, but the position of the people made it ten times worse. My father was in the House then, and Porteous — he hadn't succeeded to the title — was in the House too; he was Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and he was very much in the public eye.

ANNA. My father always used to say he was the ablest man in the party. Everyone was expecting him to be Prime Minister.

ARNOLD. You can imagine what a boon it was to the British public. They hadn't had such a treat for a generation. The most popular song of the day was about my mother. Did you ever hear it! "Naughty Lady Kitty. Thought it such a pity . . ."

ELIZABETH [*interrupting*]. Oh, Arnold, don't!

ARNOLD. And then they never let people forget them. If they'd lived quietly in Florence and not made a fuss the scandal would have died down. But those constant actions between Lord and Lady Porteous kept on reminding everyone.

TEDDIE. What were they having actions about?

ARNOLD. Of course my father divorced his wife, but Lady Porteous refused to divorce Porteous. He tried to force her by refusing to support her and turning her out of her house, and heaven knows what. They were constantly wrangling in the law courts.

ANNA. I think it was monstrous of Lady Porteous.

ARNOLD. She knew he wanted to marry my mother, and she hated my mother. You can't blame her.

ANNA. It must have been very difficult for them.

ARNOLD. That's why they've lived in Florence. Porteous has money. They found people there who were willing to accept the situation.

ELIZABETH. This is the first time they've ever come to England.

ARNOLD. My father will have to be told, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

ANNA [*to* ELIZABETH]. Has he ever spoken to you about Lady Kitty?

ELIZABETH. Never.

ARNOLD. I don't think her name has passed his lips since she ran away from this house thirty years ago.

TEDDIE. Oh, they lived here?

ARNOLD. Naturally. There was a house-party, and one evening neither

Porteous nor my mother came down to dinner. The rest of them waited. They couldn't make it out. My father sent up to my mother's room, and a note was found on the pin-cushion.

ELIZABETH [*with a faint smile*]. That's what they did in the Dark Ages.

ARNOLD. I think he took a dislike to this house from that horrible night. He never lived here again, and when I married he handed the place over to me. He just has a cottage now on the estate that he comes to when he feels inclined.

ELIZABETH. It's been very nice for us.

ARNOLD. I owe everything to my father. I don't think he'll ever forgive me for asking these people to come here.

ELIZABETH. I'm going to take all the blame on myself, Arnold.

ARNOLD [*irritably*]. The situation was embarrassing enough anyhow. I don't know how I ought to treat them.

ELIZABETH. Don't you think that'll settle itself when you see them?

ARNOLD. After all, they're my guests. I shall try and behave like a gentleman.

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't. We haven't got central heating.

ARNOLD [*taking no notice*]. Will she expect me to kiss her?

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. Surely.

ARNOLD. It always makes me uncomfortable when people are effusive.

ANNA. But I can't understand why you never saw her before.

ARNOLD. I believe she tried to see me when I was little, but my father thought it better she shouldn't.

ANNA. Yes, but when you were grown up?

ARNOLD. She was always in Italy. I never went to Italy.

ELIZABETH. It seems to me so pathetic that if you saw one another in the street you wouldn't recognize each other.

ARNOLD. Is it my fault?

ELIZABETH. You've promised to be very gentle with her and very kind.

ARNOLD. The mistake was asking Porteous to come too. It looks as though we condoned the whole thing. And how am I to treat him? Am I to shake him by the hand and slap him on the back? He absolutely ruined my father's life.

ELIZABETH [*smilingly*]. How much would you give for a nice motor accident that prevented them from coming?

ARNOLD. I let you persuade me against my better judgment, and I've regretted it ever since.

ELIZABETH [*good-humoredly*]. I think it's very lucky that Anna and Teddie are here. I don't foresee a very successful party.

ARNOLD. I'm going to do my best. I gave you my promise and I shall keep it. But I can't answer for my father.

ANNA. Here is your father.

[MR. CHAMPION-CHENEY *shows himself at one of the French windows.*]

C.-C. May I come in through the window, or shall I have myself announced by a supercilious flunkey?

ELIZABETH. Come in. We've been expecting you.

C.-C. Impatiently, I hope, my dear child.

[MR. CHAMPION-CHENEY *is a tall man in the early sixties, spare, with a fine head of gray hair and an intelligent, somewhat ascetic face. He is very carefully dressed. He is a man who makes the most of himself. He bears his years jauntily. He kisses* ELIZABETH *and then holds out his hand to* ARNOLD.]

ELIZABETH. We thought you'd be in Paris for another month.

C.-C. How are you, Arnold? I always reserve to myself the privilege of changing my mind. It's the only one elderly gentlemen share with pretty women.

ELIZABETH. You know Anna.

C.-C. [*shaking hands with her*]. Of course I do. How very nice to see you here! Are you staying long?

ANNA. As long as I'm welcome.

ELIZABETH. And this is Mr. Luton.

C.-C. How do you do? Do you play bridge?

LUTON. I do.

C.-C. Capital. Do you declare without top honors?

LUTON. Never.

C.-C. Of such is the kingdom of heaven. I see that you are a good young man.

LUTON. But, like the good in general, I am poor.

C.-C. Never mind; if your principles are right, you can play ten shillings a hundred without danger. I never play less, and I never play more.

ARNOLD. And you — are you going to stay long, father?

C.-C. To luncheon, if you'll have me.

[ARNOLD *gives* ELIZABETH *a harassed look.*]

ELIZABETH. That'll be jolly.

ARNOLD. I didn't mean that. Of course you're going to stay for luncheon. I meant, how long are you going to stay down here?

C.-C. A week.

[*There is a moment's pause. Everyone but* CHAMPION-CHENEY *is slightly embarrassed.*]

TEDDIE. I think we'd better chuck our tennis.

ELIZABETH. Yes. I want my father-in-law to tell me what they're wearing in Paris this week.

TEDDIE. I'll go and put the rackets away. [TEDDIE *goes out.*]

ARNOLD. It's nearly one o'clock, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I didn't know it was so late.

ANNA [*to* ARNOLD]. I wonder if I can persuade you to take a turn in the garden before luncheon.

ARNOLD [*jumping at the idea*]. I'd love it.

[ANNA *goes out of the window, and as he follows her he stops irresolutely.*]

I want you to look at this chair I've just got. I think it's rather good.

C.-C. Charming.

ARNOLD. About 1750, I should say. Good design, isn't it? It hasn't been restored or anything.

C.-C. Very pretty.

ARNOLD. I think it was a good buy, don't you!

C.-C. Oh, my dear boy! you know I'm entirely ignorant about these things.

ARNOLD. It's exactly my period . . . I shall see you at luncheon, then.

[*He follows* ANNA *through the window.*]

C.-C. Who is that young man?

ELIZABETH. Mr. Luton. He's only just been demobilised. He's the manager of a rubber estate in the F.M.S.

C.-C. And what are the F.M.S. when they're at home?

ELIZABETH. The Federated Malay States. He joined up at the beginning of the war. He's just going back there.

C.-C. And why have we been left alone in this very marked manner?

ELIZABETH. Have we? I didn't notice it.

C.-C. I suppose it's difficult for the young to realize that one may be old without being a fool.

ELIZABETH. I never thought you that. Everyone knows you're very intelligent.

C.-C. They certainly ought to by now. I've told them often enough. Are you a little nervous?

ELIZABETH. Let me feel my pulse. [*She puts her finger on her wrist.*] It's perfectly regular.

C.-C. When I suggested staying to luncheon Arnold looked exactly like a dose of castor oil.

ELIZABETH. I wish you'd sit down.

C.-C. Will it make it easier for you? [*He takes a chair.*] You have evidently something very disagreeable to say to me.

ELIZABETH. You won't be cross with me?

C.-C. How old are you?

ELIZABETH. Twenty-five.

C.-C. I'm never cross with a woman under thirty.

ELIZABETH. Oh, then I've got ten years.

C.-C. Mathematics?

ELIZABETH. No. Paint.

C.-C. Well?

ELIZABETH [*reflectively*]. I think it would be easier if I sat on your knees.

C.-C. That is a pleasing taste of yours, but you must take care not to put on weight. [*She sits down on his knees.*]

ELIZABETH. Am I bony?

C.-C. On the contrary. . . . I'm listening.

ELIZABETH. Lady Catherine's coming here.

C.-C. Who's Lady Catherine?

ELIZABETH. Your — Arnold's mother.

C.-C. Is she?

[*He withdraws a little and* ELIZABETH *gets up.*]

ELIZABETH. You mustn't blame Arnold. It's my fault. I insisted. He was against it. I nagged him till he gave way. And then I wrote and asked her to come.

C.-C. I didn't know you knew her.

ELIZABETH. I don't. But I heard she was in London. She's staying at Claridge's. It seemed so heartless not to take the smallest notice of her.

C.-C. When is she coming?

ELIZABETH. We're expecting her in time for luncheon.

C.-C. As soon as that? I understand the embarrassment.

ELIZABETH. You see, we never expected you to be here. You said you'd be in Paris for another month.

C.-C. My dear child, this is your house. There's no reason why you shouldn't ask whom you please to stay with you.

ELIZABETH. After all, whatever her faults, she's Arnold's mother. It seemed so unnatural that they should never see one another. My heart ached for that poor lonely woman.

C.-C. I never heard that she was lonely, and she certainly isn't poor.

ELIZABETH. And there's something else. I couldn't ask her by herself. It would have been so — so insulting. I asked Lord Porteous, too.

C.-C. I see.

ELIZABETH. I daresay you'd rather not meet them.

C.-C. I daresay they'd rather not meet me. I shall get a capital luncheon at the cottage. I've noticed you always get the best food if you come in unexpectedly and have the same as they're having in the servants' hall.

ELIZABETH. No one's ever talked to me about Lady Kitty. It's always been a subject that everyone has avoided. I've never even seen a photograph of her.

C.-C. The house was full of them when she left. I think I told the butler to throw them in the dust-bin. She was very much photographed.

ELIZABETH. Won't you tell me what she was like?

C.-C. She was very like you, Elizabeth, only she had dark hair instead of red.

ELIZABETH. Poor dear! it must be quite white now.

C.-C. I daresay. She was a pretty little thing.

ELIZABETH. But she was one of the great beauties of her day. They say she was lovely.

C.-C. She had the most adorable little nose, like yours. . . .

ELIZABETH. D'you like my nose?

C.-C. And she was very dainty, with a beautiful little figure; very light on her feet. She was like a *marquise* in an old French comedy. Yes, she was lovely.

ELIZABETH. And I'm sure she's lovely still.

C.-C. She's no chicken, you know.

ELIZABETH. You can't expect me to look at it as you and Arnold do. When you've loved as she's loved you may grow old, but you grow old beautifully.

C.-C. You're very romantic.

ELIZABETH. If everyone hadn't made much a mystery of it I daresay I shouldn't feel as I do. I know she did a great wrong to you and a great wrong to Arnold. I'm willing to acknowledge that.

C.-C. I'm sure it's very kind of you.

ELIZABETH. But she loved and she dared. Romance is such an illusive thing. You read of it in books, but it's seldom you see it face to face. I can't help it if it thrills me.

C.-C. I am painfully aware that the husband in these cases is not a romantic object.

ELIZABETH. She had the world at her feet. You were rich. She was a figure in society. And she gave up everything for love.

C.-C. [*dryly*]. I'm beginning to suspect it wasn't only for her sake and for

Arnold's that you asked her to come here.

ELIZABETH. I seem to know her already. I think her face is a little sad, for a love like that doesn't leave you gay, but I think her pale face is unlined. It's like a child's.

C.-C. My dear, how you let your imagination run away with you!

ELIZABETH. I imagine her slight and frail.

C.-C. Frail, certainly.

ELIZABETH. With beautiful thin hands and white hair. I've pictured her so often in that Renaissance Palace that they live in, with the old Masters on the walls and the lovely carved things all round, sitting in a black silk dress with old lace round her neck and old-fashioned diamonds. You see, I never knew my mother; she died when I was a baby. You can't confide in aunts with huge families of their own. I want Arnold's mother to be a mother to me. I've got so much to say to her.

C.-C. Are you happy with Arnold?

ELIZABETH. Why shouldn't I be?

C.-C. Why haven't you got any babies?

ELIZABETH. Give us a little time. We've only been married three years.

C.-C. I wonder what Hughie is like now!

ELIZABETH. Lord Porteous?

C.-C. He wore his clothes better than any man in London. You know he'd have been Prime Minister if he'd remained in politics.

ELIZABETH. What was he like then?

C.-C. He was a nice-looking fellow. Fine horseman. I suppose there was something very fascinating about him. Yellow hair and blue eyes, you know. He had a very good figure. I liked him. I was his parliamentary secretary. He was Arnold's godfather.

ELIZABETH. I know.

C.-C. I wonder if he ever regrets!

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't.

C.-C. Well, I must be strolling back to my cottage.

ELIZABETH. You're not angry with me?

C.-C. Not a bit.

[*She puts up her face for him to kiss. He kisses her on both cheeks and then goes out. In a moment* TEDDIE *is seen at the window*].

TEDDIE. I saw the old blighter go.

ELIZABETH. Come in.

TEDDIE. Everything all right?

ELIZABETH. Oh, quite, as far as he's concerned. He's going to keep out of the way.

TEDDIE. Was it beastly?

ELIZABETH. No, he made it very easy for me. He's a nice old thing.

TEDDIE. You were rather scared.

ELIZABETH. A little. I am still. I don't know why.

TEDDIE. I guessed you were. I thought I'd come and give you a little moral support. It's ripping here, isn't it?

ELIZABETH. It is rather nice.

TEDDIE. It'll be jolly to think of it when I'm back in the F.M.S.

ELIZABETH. Aren't you homesick sometimes?

TEDDIE. Oh, everyone is now and then, you know.

ELIZABETH. You could have got a job in England if you'd wanted to, couldn't you?

TEDDIE. Oh, but I love it out there. England's ripping to come back to, but I couldn't live here now. It's like a woman you're desperately in love with as long as you don't see her, but when you're with her she maddens you so that you can't bear her.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. What's wrong with England?

TEDDIE. I don't think anything's wrong with England. I expect something's wrong with me. I've been away too long. England seems to me full of people doing things they don't want to because other people expect it of them.

ELIZABETH. Isn't that what you call a high degree of civilization?

TEDDIE. People seem to me so insincere. When you go to parties in London they're all babbling about art, and you feel that in their hearts they don't care twopence about it. They read the books that everybody is talking about because they don't want to be out of it. In the

F.M.S. we don't get very many books, and we read those we have over and over again. They mean so much to us. I don't think the people over there are half so clever as the people at home, but one gets to know them better. You see, there are so few of us that we have to make the best of one another.

ELIZABETH. I imagine that frills are not much worn in the F.M.S. It must be a comfort.

TEDDIE. It's not much good being pretentious where everyone knows exactly who you are and what your income is.

ELIZABETH. I don't think you want too much sincerity in society. It would be like an iron girder in a house of cards.

TEDDIE. And then, you know, the place is ripping. You get used to a blue sky and you miss it in England.

ELIZABETH. What do you do with yourself all the time?

TEDDIE. Oh, one works like blazes. You have to be a pretty hefty fellow to be a planter. And then there's ripping bathing. You know, it's lovely, with palm trees all along the beach. And there's shooting. And now and then we have a little dance to a gramophone.

ELIZABETH [*pretending to tease him*]. I think you've got a young woman out there, Teddie.

TEDDIE [*vehemently*]. Oh, no!

[*She is a little taken aback by the earnestness of his disclaimer. There is a moment's silence, then she recovers herself.*]

ELIZABETH. But you'll have to marry and settle down one of these days, you know.

TEDDIE. I want to, but it's not a thing you can do lightly.

ELIZABETH. I don't know why there more than elsewhere.

TEDDIE. In England if people don't get on they go their own ways and jog along after a fashion. In a place like that you're thrown a great deal on your own resources.

ELIZABETH. Of course.

TEDDIE. Lots of girls come out because they think they're going to have a good time. But if they're empty-headed, then they're just faced with their own emptiness and they're done. If their husbands can afford it they go home and settle down as grass-widows.

ELIZABETH. I've met them. They seem to find it a very pleasant occupation.

TEDDIE. It's rotten for their husbands, though.

ELIZABETH. And if the husbands can't afford it?

TEDDIE. Oh, then they tipple.

ELIZABETH. It's not a very alluring prospect.

TEDDIE. But if the woman's the right sort she wouldn't exchange it for any life in the world. When all's said and done it's we who've made the Empire.

ELIZABETH. What sort is the right sort?

TEDDIE. A woman of courage and endurance and sincerity. Of course, it's hopeless unless she's in love with her husband.

[*He is looking at her earnestly and she, raising her eyes, gives him a long look. There is silence between them.*]

TEDDIE. My house stands on the side of a hill, and the cocoanut trees wind down to the shore. Azaleas grow in my garden, and camellias, and all sorts of ripping flowers. And in front of me is the winding coast line, and then the blue sea. [*A pause.*] Do you know that I'm awfully in love with you?

ELIZABETH [*gravely*]. I wasn't quite sure. I wondered.

TEDDIE. And you? [*She nods slowly.*] I've never kissed you.

ELIZABETH. I don't want you to.

[*They look at one another steadily. They are both grave.*]

[ARNOLD *comes in hurriedly.*]

ARNOLD. They're coming, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH [*as though returning from a distant world*]. Who?

ARNOLD [*impatiently*]. My dear! My mother, of course. The car is just coming up the drive.

TEDDIE. Would you like me to clear out?

ARNOLD. No, no! For goodness' sake stay.

ELIZABETH. We'd better go and meet them, Arnold.

ARNOLD. No, no; I think they'd much better be shown in. I feel simply sick with nervousness.

[ANNA *comes in from the garden.*]

ANNA. Your guests have arrived.

ELIZABETH. Yes, I know.

ARNOLD. I've given orders that luncheon should be served at once.

ELIZABETH. Why? It's not half-past one already, is it?

ARNOLD. I thought it would help. When you don't know exactly what to say you can always eat.

[*The* BUTLER *comes in and announces.*]

BUTLER. Lady Catherine Champion-Cheney! Lord Porteous!

[LADY KITTY *comes in followed by* PORTEOUS, *and the* BUTLER *goes out.* LADY KITTY *is a gay little lady, with dyed red hair and painted cheeks. She is somewhat outrageously dressed. She never forgets that she has been a pretty woman and she still behaves as if she were twenty-five.* LORD PORTEOUS *is a very bald, elderly gentleman in loose, rather eccentric clothes. He is snappy and gruff. This is not at all the couple that Elizabeth had expected, and for a moment she stares at them with round, startled eyes.* LADY KITTY *goes up to her with outstretched hands.*]

LADY KITTY. Elizabeth! Elizabeth! [*She kisses her effusively.*] What an adorable creature! [*Turning to* PORTEOUS.] Hughie, isn't she adorable?

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

[ELIZABETH, *smiling now, turns to him and gives him her hand.*]

ELIZABETH. How d'you do?

PORTEOUS. Damnable road you've got down here. How d'you do, my dear? Why d'you have such damnable roads in England?

[LADY KITTY'S *eyes fall on* TEDDIE *and she goes up to him with her arms thrown back, prepared to throw them around him.*]

LADY KITTY. My boy, my boy! I should have known you anywhere!

ELIZABETH [*hastily.*] That's Arnold.

LADY KITTY [*without a moment's hesitation*]. The image of his father! I should have known him anywhere! [*She throws her arms around his neck.*] My boy, my boy!

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

LADY KITTY. Tell me, would you have known me again? Have I changed?

ARNOLD. I was only five, you know, when — when you. . . .

LADY KITTY [*emotionally*]. I remember as if it was yesterday. I went up into your room. [*With a sudden change of manner.*] By the way, I always thought that nurse drank. Did you ever find out if she really did?

PORTEOUS. How the devil can you expect him to know that, Kitty?

LADY KITTY. You've never had a child, Hughie; how can you tell what they know and what they don't?

ELIZABETH [*coming to the rescue*]. This is Arnold, Lord Porteous.

PORTEOUS [*shaking hands with him*]. How d'you do? I knew your father.

ARNOLD. Yes.

PORTEOUS. Alive still?

ARNOLD. Yes.

PORTEOUS. He must be getting on. Is he well?

ARNOLD. Very.

PORTEOUS. Ugh! Takes care of himself, I suppose. I'm not at all well. This damned climate doesn't agree with me.

ELIZABETH [*to* LADY KITTY]. This is Mrs. Shenstone. And this is Mr. Luton. I hope you don't mind a very small party.

LADY KITTY [*shaking hands with* ANNA *and* TEDDIE]. Oh, no, I shall enjoy it. I used to give enormous parties here. Political, you know. How nice you've made this room!

ELIZABETH. Oh, that's Arnold.

ARNOLD [*nervously*]. D'you like this chair? I've just bought it. It's exactly my period.

PORTEOUS [*bluntly*]. It's a fake.

ARNOLD [*indignantly*]. I don't think it is for a minute.

PORTEOUS. The legs are not right.

ARNOLD. I don't know how you can say that. If there is anything right about it, it's the legs.

LADY KITTY. I'm sure they're right.

PORTEOUS. You know nothing whatever about it, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. That's what you think. *I* think it's a beautiful chair. Hepplewhite?

ARNOLD. No, Sheraton.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I know. *The School for Scandal.*

PORTEOUS. Sheraton, my dear. Sheraton.

LADY KITTY. Yes, that's what I say. I acted the screen scene at some amateur theatricals in Florence, and Ermeto Novelli, the great Italian tragedian, told me he'd never seen a Lady Teazle like me.

PORTEOUS. Ugh!

LADY KITTY [*to* ELIZABETH]. Do you act?

ELIZABETH. Oh, I couldn't. I should be too nervous.

LADY KITTY. I'm never nervous. I'm a born actress. Of course, if I had my time over again I'd go on the stage. You know, it's extraordinary how they keep young. Actresses, I mean. I think it's because they're always playing different parts. Hughie, do you think Arnold takes after me or after his father? Of course I think he's the very image of me. Arnold, I think I ought to tell you that I was received into the Catholic Church last winter. I'd been thinking about it for years, and last time we were at Monte Carlo I met such a nice monsignore. I told him what my difficulties were and he was too wonderful. I knew Hughie wouldn't approve, so I kept it a secret. [*To* ELIZABETH.] Are you interested in religion? I think it's too wonderful. We must have a long talk about it one of these days. [*Pointing to her frock.*] Callot?

ELIZABETH. No, Worth.

LADY KITTY. I knew it was either Worth or Callot. Of course, it's line that's the important thing. I go to Worth myself, and I always say to him, "Line, my dear Worth, line." What *is* the matter, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. These new teeth of mine are so damned uncomfortable.

LADY KITTY. Men are extraordinary. They can't stand the smallest discomfort. Why, a woman's life is uncomfortable from the moment she gets up in the morning till the moment she goes to bed at night. And d'you think it's comfortable to sleep with a mask on your face?

PORTEOUS. They don't seem to hold up properly.

LADY KITTY. Well, that's not the fault of your teeth. That's the fault of your gums.

PORTEOUS. Damned rotten dentist. That's what's the matter.

LADY KITTY. I thought he was a very nice dentist. He told me *my* teeth would last till I was fifty. He has a Chinese room. It's so interesting; while he scrapes your teeth he tells you all about the dear Empress Dowager. Are you interested in China? I think it's too wonderful. You know they've cut off their pigtails. I think it's such a pity. They were so picturesque.

[*The* BUTLER *comes in.*]

BUTLER. Luncheon is served, sir.

ELIZABETH. Would you like to see your rooms?

PORTEOUS. We can see our rooms after luncheon.

LADY KITTY. I must powder my nose, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Powder it down here.

LADY KITTY. I never saw anyone so inconsiderate.

PORTEOUS. You'll keep us all waiting half an hour, I know you.

LADY KITTY [*fumbling in her bag*]. Oh, well, peace at any price, as Lord Beaconsfield said.

PORTEOUS. He said a lot of damned silly things, Kitty, but he never said that.

[LADY KITTY'S *face changes. Perplexity is followed by dismay, and dismay by consternation.*]

LADY KITTY. Oh!

ELIZABETH. What is the matter?

LADY KITTY [*with anguish*]. My lip-stick!

ELIZABETH. Can't you find it?

LADY KITTY. I had it in the car. Hughie, you remember that I had it in the car.

PORTEOUS. I don't remember anything about it.

LADY KITTY. Don't be so stupid, Hughie. Why, when we came through the gates I said: "My home, my home!" and I took it out and put some on my lips.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps you dropped it in the car.

LADY KITTY. For heaven's sake send some one to look for it.

ARNOLD. I'll ring.

LADY KITTY. I'm absolutely lost without my lip-stick. Lend me yours, darling, will you?

ELIZABETH. I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I haven't got one.

LADY KITTY. Do you mean to say you don't use a lip-stick?

ELIZABETH. Never.

PORTEOUS. Look at her lips. What the devil d'you think she wants muck like that for?

LADY KITTY. Oh, my dear, what a mistake you make! You *must* use a lip-stick. It's so good for the lips. Men like it, you know. I couldn't *live* without a lip-stick.

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *appears at the window holding in his upstretched hand a little gold case.*]

C.-C. [*as he comes in*]. Has anyone here lost a diminutive utensil containing, unless I am mistaken, a favorite preparation for the toilet?

[ARNOLD *and* ELIZABETH *are thunderstruck at his appearance and even* TEDDIE *and* ANNA *are taken aback. But* LADY KITTY *is overjoyed.*]

LADY KITTY. My lip-stick!

C.-C. I found it in the drive and ventured to bring it in.

LADY KITTY. It's Saint Antony. I said a little prayer to him when I was hunting in my bag.

PORTEOUS. Saint Antony be blowed! It's Clive, by God!

LADY KITTY [*startled, her attention suddenly turning from the lip-stick*]. Clive!

C.-C. You didn't recognize me. It's many years since we met.

LADY KITTY. My poor Clive, your hair has gone quite white!

C.-C. [*holding out his hand*]. I hope you had a pleasant journey down from London.

LADY KITTY [*offering him her cheek*]. You may kiss me, Clive.

C.-C. [*kissing her*]. You don't mind, Hughie?

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

C.-C. [*going up to him cordially*]. And how are you, my dear Hughie?

PORTEOUS. Damned rheumatic if you want to know. Filthy climate you have in this country.

C.-C. Aren't you going to shake hands with me, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. I have no objection to shaking hands with you.

C.-C. You've aged, my poor Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Some one was asking me how old you were the other day.

C.-C. Were they surprised when you told them?

PORTEOUS. Surprised! They wondered you weren't dead.

[*The* BUTLER *comes in.*]

BUTLER. Did you ring, sir?

ARNOLD. No. Oh, yes, I did. It doesn't matter now.

C.-C. [*as the* BUTLER *is going*]. One moment. My dear Elizabeth, I've come to throw myself on your mercy. My servants are busy with their own affairs. There's not a thing for me to eat in my cottage.

ELIZABETH. Oh, but we shall be delighted if you'll lunch with us.

C.-C. It either means that or my immediate death from starvation. You don't mind, Arnold?

ARNOLD. My dear father!

ELIZABETH [*to the* BUTLER]. Mr. Cheney will lunch here.

BUTLER. Very good, ma'am.

C.-C. [*to* LADY KITTY]. And what do you think of Arnold?

LADY KITTY. I adore him.

C.-C. He's grown, hasn't he? But then you'd expect him to do that in thirty years.

ARNOLD. For God's sake let's go in to lunch, Elizabeth!

ACT II

The Scene is the same as in the preceding Act. It is afternoon. When the curtain rises PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY, ANNA *and* TEDDIE *are playing bridge.* ELIZABETH *and* CHAMPION-CHENEY *are watching.* PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY *are partners.*

C.-C. When will Arnold be back, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. Soon, I think.

C.-C. Is he addressing a meeting?

ELIZABETH. No, it's only a conference with his agent and one or two constituents.

PORTEOUS [*irritably*]. How anyone can be expected to play bridge when people are shouting at the top of their voices all round them, I for one cannot understand.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. I'm so sorry.

ANNA. I can see your hand, Lord Porteous.

PORTEOUS. It may help you.

LADY KITTY. I've told you over and over again to hold your cards up. It ruins one's game when one can't help seeing one's opponent's hand.

PORTEOUS. One isn't obliged to look.

LADY KITTY. What was Arnold's majority at the last election?

ELIZABETH. Seven hundred and something.

C.-C. He'll have to fight for it if he wants to keep his seat next time.

PORTEOUS. Are we playing bridge, or talking politics?

LADY KITTY. I never find that conversation interferes with my game.

PORTEOUS. You certainly play no worse when you talk than when you hold your tongue.

LADY KITTY. I think that's a very offensive thing to say, Hughie. Just because I don't play the same game as you do you think I can't play.

PORTEOUS. I'm glad you acknowledge it's not the same game as I play. But why in God's name do you call it bridge?

C.-C. I agree with Kitty. I hate people who play bridge as though they were at a funeral and knew their feet were getting wet.

PORTEOUS. Of course you take Kitty's part.

LADY KITTY. That's the least he can do.

C.-C. I have a naturally cheerful disposition.

PORTEOUS. You've never had anything to sour it.

LADY KITTY. I don't know what you mean by that, Hughie.

PORTEOUS [*trying to contain himself*]. Must you trump my ace?

LADY KITTY [*innocently*]. Oh, was that your ace, darling?

PORTEOUS [*furiously*]. Yes, it was my ace.

LADY KITTY. Oh well, it was the only trump I had. I shouldn't have made it anyway.

PORTEOUS. You needn't have told them that. Now she knows exactly what I've got.

LADY KITTY. She knew before.

PORTEOUS. How could she know?

LADY KITTY. She said she'd seen your hand.

ANNA. Oh, I didn't. I said I could see it.

LADY KITTY. Well, I naturally supposed that if she could see it she did.

PORTEOUS. Really, Kitty, you have the most extraordinary ideas.

C.-C. Not at all, if anyone is such a fool as to show me his hand, of course I look at it.

PORTEOUS [*fuming*]. If you study the etiquette of bridge, you'll discover that on-lookers are expected not to interfere with the game.

C.-C. My dear Hughie, this is a matter of ethics, not of bridge.

ANNA. Anyhow, I get the game. And rubber.

TEDDIE. I claim a revoke.

PORTEOUS. Who revoked?

TEDDIE. You did.

PORTEOUS. Nonsense. I've never revoked in my life.

TEDDIE. I'll show you. [*He turns over the tricks to show the faces of the cards.*] You threw away a club on the third heart trick and you had another heart.

PORTEOUS. I never had more than two hearts.

TEDDIE. Oh, yes, you had. Look here. That's the card you played on the last trick but one.

LADY KITTY [*delighted to catch him out*]. There's no doubt about it, Hughie. You revoked.

PORTEOUS. I tell you I did not revoke. I never revoke.

C.-C. You did, Hughie. I wondered what on earth you were doing.

PORTEOUS. I don't know how anyone can be expected not to revoke when there's this confounded chatter going on all the time.

TEDDIE. Well, that's another hundred to us.

PORTEOUS [*to* CHAMPION-CHENEY]. I wish you wouldn't breathe down my neck. I never can play bridge when there's somebody breathing down my neck.

[*The party have risen from the bridge-table, and they scatter about the room.*]

ANNA. Well, I'm going to take a book and lie down in the hammock till it's time to dress.

TEDDIE [*who has been adding up*]. I'll put it down in the book, shall I?

PORTEOUS [*who has not moved, setting out the cards for a patience*]. Yes, yes, put it down. I never revoke.

[ANNA *goes out.*]

LADY KITTY. Would you like to come for a little stroll, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. What for?

LADY KITTY. Exercise.

PORTEOUS. I hate exercise.

C.-C. [*looking at the patience*]. The seven goes on the eight.

[PORTEOUS *takes no notice.*]

LADY KITTY. The seven goes on the eight, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I don't choose to put the seven on the eight.

C.-C. That knave goes on the queen.

PORTEOUS. I'm not blind, thank you.

LADY KITTY. The three goes on the four.

C.-C. All these go over.

PORTEOUS [*furiously*]. Am I playing this patience, or are you playing it?

LADY KITTY. But you're missing everything.

PORTEOUS. That's my business.

C.-C. It's no good losing your temper over it, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Go away, both of you. You irritate me.

LADY KITTY. We were only trying to help you, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I don't want to be helped. I want to do it by myself.

LADY KITTY. I think your manners are perfectly deplorable, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. It's simply maddening when you're playing patience and people won't leave you alone.

C.-C. We won't say another word.

PORTEOUS. That three goes. I believe it's coming out. If I'd been such a fool as to put that seven up I shouldn't have been able to bring these down.

[*He puts down several cards while they watch him silently.*]

LADY KITTY and C.-C. [*together*]. The four goes on the five.

PORTEOUS [*throwing down the cards violently*]. Damn you! why don't you leave me alone? It's intolerable.

C.-C. It was coming out, my dear fellow.

PORTEOUS. I know it was coming out. Confound you!

LADY KITTY. How petty you are, Hughie!

PORTEOUS. Petty, be damned! I've told you over and over again that I will not be interfered with when I'm playing patience.

LADY KITTY. Don't talk to me like that, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I shall talk to you as I please.

LADY KITTY [*beginning to cry*]. Oh, you brute! You brute!

[*She flings out of the room.*]

PORTEOUS. Oh, damn! now she's going to cry.

[*He shambles out into the garden.* CHAMPION-CHENEY, ELIZABETH, *and* TEDDIE *are left alone. There is a moment's pause.* CHAMPION-CHENEY *looks from* TEDDIE *to* ELIZABETH, *with an ironical smile.*]

C.-C. Upon my soul, they might be married. They frip so much.

ELIZABETH [*frigidly*]. It's been nice of you to come here so often since they arrived. It's helped to make things easy.

C.-C. Irony? It's a rhetorical form not much favored in this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

ELIZABETH. What exactly are you getting at?

C.-C. How slangy the young women of the present day are! I suppose the fact that Arnold is a purist leads you to the contrary extravagance.

ELIZABETH. Anyhow, you know what I mean.

C.-C. [*with a smile*]. I have a dim, groping suspicion.

ELIZABETH. You promised to keep away. Why did you come back the moment they arrived?

C.-C. Curiosity, my dear child. A surely pardonable curiosity.

ELIZABETH. And since then you've been here all the time. You don't generally favor us with so much of your company when you're down at your cottage.

C.-C. I've been excessively amused.

ELIZABETH. It has struck me that whenever they started fripping you took a malicious pleasure in goading them on.

C.-C. I don't think there's much love lost between them now, do you?

[TEDDIE *is making as though to leave the room.*]

ELIZABETH. Don't, go, Teddie.

C.-C. No, please don't. I'm only staying a minute. We were talking about Lady Kitty just before she arrived. [*To* ELIZABETH.] Do you remember? The pale, frail lady in black satin and old lace.

ELIZABETH [*with a chuckle*]. You are a devil, you know.

C.-C. Ah, well, he's always had the reputation of being a humorist and a gentleman.

ELIZABETH. Did *you* expect her to be like that, poor dear?

C.-C. My dear child, I hadn't the vaguest idea. You were asking me the other day what she was like when she ran away. I didn't tell you half. She was so gay and so natural. Who would have thought that animation would turn into such frivolity, and that charming impulsiveness lead to such a ridiculous affectation?

ELIZABETH. It rather sets my nerves on edge to hear the way you talk of her.

C.-C. It's the truth that sets your nerves on edge, not I.

ELIZABETH. You loved her once. Have you no feeling for her at all?

C.-C. None. Why should I?

ELIZABETH. She's the mother of your son.

C.-C. My dear child, you have a charming nature, as simple, frank, and artless as hers was. Don't let pure humbug obscure your common sense.

ELIZABETH. We have no right to judge. She's only been here two days. We know nothing about her.

C.-C. My dear, her soul is as thickly rouged as her face. She hasn't an emotion that's sincere. She's tinsel. You think I'm a cruel, cynical old man. Why, when I think of what she was, if I didn't laugh at what she has become I should cry.

ELIZABETH. How do you know she wouldn't be just the same now if she'd remained your wife? Do you think your influence would have had such a salutary effect on her?

C.-C. [*good-humoredly*]. I like you when you're bitter and rather insolent.

ELIZABETH. D'you like me well enough to answer my question?

C.-C. She was only twenty-seven when she went away. She might have become anything. She might have become the woman you expected her to be. There are very few of us who are strong enough to make circumstances serve us. We are the creatures of our environment. She's a silly, worthless woman because she's led a silly, worthless life.

ELIZABETH [*disturbed*]. You're horrible to-day.

C.-C. I won't say it's I who could have prevented her from becoming this ridiculous caricature of a pretty woman grown old. But life could. Here she would have had the friends fit to her station, and a decent activity, and worthy interests. Ask her what her life has been all these years among divorced women and kept women and the men who consort with them. There is no more lamentable pursuit than a life of pleasure.

ELIZABETH. At all events she loved and she loved greatly. I have only pity and affection for her.

C.-C. And if she loved what d'you think she felt when she saw that she had ruined Hughie? Look at him. He was tight last night after dinner and tight the night before.

ELIZABETH. I know.

C.-C. And she took it as a matter of course. How long do you suppose he's been getting tight every night? Do you think he was like that thirty years ago? Can you imagine that that was a brilliant young man, whom everyone expected to be Prime Minister? Look at him now. A grumpy sodden old fellow with false teeth.

ELIZABETH. You have false teeth, too.

C.-C. Yes, but damn it all, they fit. She's ruined him and she knows she's ruined him.

ELIZABETH [*looking at him suspiciously*]. Why are you saying all this to me?

C.-C. Am I hurting your feelings?

ELIZABETH. I think I've had enough for the present.

C.-C. I'll go and have a look at the gold-fish. I want to see Arnold when he comes in. [*Politely.*] I'm afraid we've been boring Mr. Luton.

TEDDIE. Not at all.

C.-C. When are you back to the F.M.S.?

TEDDIE. In about a month.

C.-C. I see. [*He goes out.*]

ELIZABETH. I wonder what he has at the back of his head.

TEDDIE. D'you think he was talking at you?

ELIZABETH. He's as clever as a bagful of monkeys.

[*There is a moment's pause.* TEDDIE *hesitates a little and when he speaks it is in a different tone. He is grave and somewhat nervous.*]

TEDDIE. It seems very difficult to get a few minutes alone with you. I wonder if you've been making it difficult?

ELIZABETH. I wanted to think.

TEDDIE. I've made up my mind to go away to-morrow.

ELIZABETH. Why?

TEDDIE. I want you altogether or not at all.

ELIZABETH. You're so arbitrary.

TEDDIE. You said you—you said you cared for me.

ELIZABETH. I do.

TEDDIE. Do you mind if we talk it over now?

ELIZABETH. No.

TEDDIE [*frowning*]. It makes me feel rather shy and awkward. I've repeated to myself over and over again exactly what I want to say to you, and now all I'd prepared seems rather footling.

ELIZABETH. I'm so afraid I'm going to cry.

TEDDIE. I feel it's all so tremendously serious and I think we ought to keep emotion out of it. You're rather emotional, aren't you?

ELIZABETH [*half smiling and half in tears*]. So are you for the matter of that.

TEDDIE. That's why I wanted to have everything I meant to say to you cut and dried. I think it would be awfully unfair if I made love to you and all that sort of thing, and you were carried away. I wrote it all down and thought I'd send it you as a letter.

ELIZABETH. Why didn't you?

TEDDIE. I got the wind up. A letter seems so — so cold. You see, I love you so awfully.

ELIZABETH. For goodness' sake don't say that.

TEDDIE. You mustn't cry. Please don't, or I shall go all to pieces.

ELIZABETH [*trying to smile*]. I'm sorry. It doesn't mean anything really. It's only tears running out of my eyes.

TEDDIE. Our only chance is to be awfully matter-of-fact.

[*He stops for a moment. He finds it quite difficult to control himself. He clears his throat. He frowns with annoyance at himself.*]

ELIZABETH. What's the matter?

TEDDIE. I've got a sort of lump in my throat. It is idiotic. I think I'll have a cigarette. [*She watches him in silence while he lights a cigarette.*] You see, I've never been in love with anyone before, not really. It's knocked me endways. I don't know how I can live without you now. . . . Does that old fool know I'm in love with you?

ELIZABETH. I think so.

TEDDIE. When he was talking about Lady Kitty smashing up Lord Porteous' career I thought there was something at the back of it.

ELIZABETH. I think he was trying to persuade me not to smash up yours.

TEDDIE. I'm sure that's very considerate of him, but I don't happen to have one to smash. I wish I had. It's the only time in my life I've wished I were a hell of a swell so that I could chuck it all and show how much more you are to me than anything else in the world.

ELIZABETH [*affectionately*]. You're a dear old thing, Teddie.

TEDDIE. You know, I don't really know how to make love, but if I did I couldn't do it now because I just want to be absolutely practical.

ELIZABETH [*chaffing him*]. I'm glad you don't know how to make love. It would be almost more than I could bear.

TEDDIE. You see, I'm not at all romantic and that sort of thing. I'm just a common or garden business man. All this is so dreadfully serious and I think we ought to be sensible.

ELIZABETH [*with a break in her voice*]. You owl!

TEDDIE. No, Elizabeth, don't say things like that to me. I want you to consider all the *pros* and *cons*, and my heart's thumping against my chest, and you know I love you, I love you, I love you.

ELIZABETH [*in a sigh of passion*]. Oh, my precious!

TEDDIE [*impatiently, but with himself, rather than with* ELIZABETH]. Don't be so idiotic, Elizabeth. I'm not going to tell you that I can't live without you and a lot of muck like that. You know that you mean everything in the world to me. [*Almost giving it up as a bad job.*] Oh, my God!

ELIZABETH [*her voice faltering*]. D'you think there's anything you can say to me that I don't know already?

TEDDIE [*desperately*]. But I haven't said a single thing I wanted to. I'm a business man and I want to put it all in a business way, if you understand what I mean.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. I don't believe you're a very good business man.

TEDDIE [*sharply*]. You don't know what you're talking about. I'm a first-rate business man, but somehow this is different. [*Hopelessly.*] I don't know why it won't go right.

ELIZABETH. What are we going to do about it?

TEDDIE. You see, it's not just because you're awfully pretty that I love you, I'd love you just as much if you were old and ugly. It's you I love, not what you look like. And it's not only love; love be blowed! It's that I *like* you so tremendously. I think you're such a ripping good sort. I just want to be with you. I feel so jolly and happy just to think you're there. I'm so awfully *fond* of you.

ELIZABETH [*laughing through her tears*]. I don't know if this is your idea of introducing a business proposition.

TEDDIE. Damn you, you won't let me.

ELIZABETH. You said, "Damn you!"

TEDDIE. I meant it.

ELIZABETH. Your voice sounded as if you meant it, you perfect duck!

TEDDIE. Really, Elizabeth you're intolerable.

ELIZABETH. I'm doing nothing.

TEDDIE. Yes, you are, you're putting me off my blow. What I want to say is perfectly simple. I'm a very ordinary business man.

ELIZABETH. You've said that before.

TEDDIE [*angrily*]. Shut up. I haven't got a bob besides what I earn. I've got no position. I'm nothing. You're rich and you're a big pot and you've got everything that anyone can want. It's awful cheek my saying anything to you at all. But after all there's only one thing that really matters in the world, and that's love. I love you. Chuck all this, Elizabeth, and come to me.

ELIZABETH. Are you cross with me?

TEDDIE. Furious.

ELIZABETH. Darling!

TEDDIE. If you don't want me tell me so at once and let me get out quickly.

ELIZABETH. Teddie, nothing in the world matters anything to me but you. I'll go wherever you take me. I love you.

TEDDIE [*all to pieces*]. Oh, my God!

ELIZABETH. Does it mean as much to you as that? Oh, Teddie!

TEDDIE [*trying to control himself*]. Don't be a fool, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. It's you're the fool. You're making me cry.

TEDDIE. You're so damned emotional.

ELIZABETH. Damned emotional yourself. I'm sure you're a rotten business man.

TEDDIE. I don't care what you think. You've made me so awfully happy. I say, what a lark life's going to be!

ELIZABETH. Teddie, you are an angel.

TEDDIE. Let's get out quick. It's no good wasting time. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. What?

TEDDIE. Nothing. I just like to say Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. You fool!

TEDDIE. I say, can you shoot?

ELIZABETH. No.

TEDDIE. I'll teach you. You don't know how ripping it is to start out from camp at dawn and travel through the jungle. And you're so tired at night and the sky's all starry. It's a fair treat. Of course I didn't want to say anything about all that till you'd decided. I'd made up my mind to be absolutely practical.

ELIZABETH [*chaffing him*]. The only practical thing you said was that love is the only thing that really matters.

TEDDIE [*happily*]. Pull the other leg next time, will you? I should have to have one longer than the other.

ELIZABETH. Isn't it fun being in love with some one who's in love with you?

TEDDIE. I say, I think I'd better clear out at once, don't you? It seems rather rotten to stay on in — in this house.

ELIZABETH. You can't go to-night. There's no train.

TEDDIE. I'll go to-morrow. I'll wait in London till you're ready to join me.

ELIZABETH. I'm not going to leave a note on the pin-cushion like Lady Kitty, you know. I'm going to tell Arnold.

TEDDIE. Are you? Don't you think there'll be an awful bother?

ELIZABETH. I must face it. I should hate to be sly and deceitful.

TEDDIE. Well, then, let's face it together.

ELIZABETH. No, I'll talk to Arnold by myself.

TEDDIE. You won't let anyone influence you?

ELIZABETH. No.

[*He holds out his hand and she takes it. They look into one another's eyes with grave, almost solemn affection. There is the sound outside of a car driving up.*]

ELIZABETH. There's the car. Arnold's come back. I must go and bathe my eyes. I don't want them to see I've been crying.

TEDDIE. All right. [*As she is going*]. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH [*stopping*]. What?

TEDDIE. Bless you.

ELIZABETH [*affectionately*]. Idiot!

[*She goes out of the door and* TED-

DIE *through the French window into the garden. For an instant the room is empty.*]

[ARNOLD *comes in. He sits down and takes some papers out of his despatch-case.* LADY KITTY *enters. He gets up.*]

LADY KITTY. I saw you come in. Oh, my dear, don't get up. There's no reason why you should be so dreadfully polite to me.

ARNOLD. I've just rung for a cup of tea.

LADY KITTY. Perhaps we shall have the chance of a little talk. We don't seem to have had five minutes by ourselves. I want to make your acquaintance, you know.

ARNOLD. I should like you to know that it's not by my wish that my father is here.

LADY KITTY. But I'm so interested to see him.

ARNOLD. I was afraid that you and Lord Porteous must find it embarrassing.

LADY KITTY. Oh, no. Hughie was his greatest friend. They were at Eton and Oxford together. I think your father has improved so much since I saw him last. He wasn't good-looking as a young man, but now he's quite handsome.

[*The* FOOTMAN *brings in a tray on which are tea-things.*]

LADY KITTY. Shall I pour it out for you?

ARNOLD. Thank you very much.

LADY KITTY. Do you take sugar?

ARNOLD. No. I gave it up during the war.

LADY KITTY. So wise of you. It's so bad for the figure. Besides being patriotic, of course. Isn't it absurd that I should ask my son if he takes sugar or not? Life is really very quaint. Sad, of course, but oh, so quaint! Often I lie in bed at night and have a good laugh to myself as I think how quaint life is.

ARNOLD. I'm afraid I'm a very serious person.

LADY KITTY. How old are you now, Arnold?

ARNOLD. Thirty-five.

LADY KITTY. Are you really? Of course, I was a child when I married your father.

ARNOLD. Really. He always told me you were twenty-two.

LADY KITTY. Oh, what nonsense! Why, I was married out of the nursery. I put my hair up for the first time on my wedding-day.

ARNOLD. Where is Lord Porteous?

LADY KITTY. My dear, it sounds too absurd to hear you call him Lord Porteous. Why don't you call him — Uncle Hughie?

ARNOLD. He doesn't happen to be my uncle.

LADY KITTY. No, but he's your godfather. You know, I'm sure you'll like him when you know him better. I'm so hoping that you and Elizabeth will come and stay with us in Florence. I simply adore Elizabeth. She's too beautiful.

ARNOLD. Her hair is very pretty.

LADY KITTY. It's not touched up, is it?

ARNOLD. Oh, no.

LADY KITTY. I just wondered. It's rather a coincidence that her hair should be the same color as mine. I suppose it shows that your father and you are attracted by just the same thing. So interesting, heredity, isn't it?

ARNOLD. Very.

LADY KITTY. Of course, since I joined the Catholic Church I don't believe in it any more. Darwin and all that sort of thing. Too dreadful. Wicked, you know. Besides, it's not very good form, is it?

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *comes in from the garden.*]

C.-C. Do I intrude?

LADY KITTY. Come in, Clive. Arnold and I have been having such a wonderful heart-to-heart talk.

C.-C. Very nice.

ARNOLD. Father, I stepped in for a moment at the Harveys' on my way back. It's simply criminal what they're doing with that house.

C.-C. What are they doing?

ARNOLD. It's an almost perfect Georgian house and they've got a lot of dreadful Victorian furniture. I gave them my ideas on the subject, but it's quite hopeless. They said they were attached to their furniture.

C.-C. Arnold should have been an interior decorator.

LADY KITTY. He has wonderful taste. He gets that from me.

ARNOLD. I suppose I have a certain *flair*. I have a passion for decorating houses.

LADY KITTY. You've made this one charming.

C.-C. D'you remember, we just had chintzes and comfortable chairs when we lived here, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. Perfectly hideous, wasn't it?

C.-C. In those days gentlemen and ladies were not expected to have taste.

ARNOLD. You know, I've been looking at this chair again. Since Lord Porteous said the legs weren't right I've been very uneasy.

LADY KITTY. He only said that because he was in a bad temper.

C.-C. His temper seems to me very short these days, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. Oh, it is.

ARNOLD. You feel he knows what he's talking about. I gave seventy-five pounds for that chair. I'm very seldom taken in. I always think if a thing's right you feel it.

C.-C. Well, don't let it disturb your night's rest.

ARNOLD. But, my dear father, that's just what it does. I had a most horrible dream about it last night.

LADY KITTY. Here is Hughie.

ARNOLD. I'm going to fetch a book I have on Old English furniture. There's an illustration of a chair which is almost identical with this one.

[PORTEOUS *comes in.*]

PORTEOUS. Quite a family gathering, by George!

C.-C. I was thinking just now we'd make a very pleasing picture of a typical English home.

ARNOLD. I'll be back in five minutes. There's something I want to show you, Lord Porteous. [*He goes out.*]

C.-C. Would you like to play piquet with me, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. Not particularly.

C.-C. You were never much of a piquet player, were you?

PORTEOUS. My dear Clive, you people don't know what piquet is in England.

C.-C. Let's have a game then. You may make money.

PORTEOUS. I don't want to play with you.

LADY KITTY. I don't know why not, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Let me tell you that I don't like your manner.

C.-C. I'm sorry for that. I'm afraid I can't offer to change it at my age.

PORTEOUS. I don't know what you want to be hanging around here for.

C.-C. A natural attachment to my home.

PORTEOUS. If you'd had any tact you'd have kept out of the way while we were here.

C.-C. My dear Hughie, I don't understand your attitude at all. If I'm willing to let bygones be bygones why should you object?

PORTEOUS. Damn it all, they're not bygones.

C.-C. After all, I am the injured party.

PORTEOUS. How the devil are you the injured party?

C.-C. Well, you did run away with my wife, didn't you?

LADY KITTY. Now, don't let's go into ancient history. I can't see why we shouldn't all be friends.

PORTEOUS. I beg you not to interfere, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I'm very fond of Clive.

PORTEOUS. You never cared two straws for Clive. You only say that to irritate me.

LADY KITTY. Not at all. I don't see why he shouldn't come and stay with us.

C.-C. I'd love to. I think Florence

in spring-time is delightful. Have you central heating?

PORTEOUS. I never liked you, I don't like you now, and I never shall like you.

C.-C. How very unfortunate! because I liked you, I like you now, and I shall continue to like you.

LADY KITTY. There's something very nice about you, Clive.

PORTEOUS. If you think that, why the devil did you leave him?

LADY KITTY. Are you going to reproach me because I loved you? How utterly, utterly, utterly detestable you are!

C.-C. Now, now, don't quarrel with one another.

LADY KITTY. It's all his fault. I'm the easiest person in the world to live with. But really he'd try the patience of a saint.

C.-C. Come, come, don't get upset, Kitty. When two people live together there must be a certain amount of give and take.

PORTEOUS. I don't know what the devil you're talking about.

C.-C. It hasn't escaped my observation that you are a little inclined to frip. Many couples are. I think it's a pity.

PORTEOUS. Would you have the very great kindness to mind your own business?

LADY KITTY. It is his business. He naturally wants me to be happy.

C.-C. I have the very greatest affection for Kitty.

PORTEOUS. Then why the devil didn't you look after her properly?

C.-C. My dear Hughie, you were my greatest friend. I trusted you. It may have been rash.

PORTEOUS. It was inexcusable.

LADY KITTY. I don't know what you mean by that, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Don't, don't, don't try and bully me, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I know what you mean.

PORTEOUS. Then why the devil did you say you didn't?

LADY KITTY. When I think that I sacrificed everything for that man! And for thirty years I've had to live in a filthy marble palace with no sanitary conveniences.

C.-C. D'you mean to say you haven't got a bathroom?

LADY KITTY. I've had to wash in a tub.

C.-C. My poor Kitty, how you've suffered!

PORTEOUS. Really, Kitty, I'm sick of hearing of the sacrifices you made. I suppose you think I sacrificed nothing. I should have been Prime Minister by now if it hadn't been for you.

LADY KITTY. Nonsense!

PORTEOUS. What do you mean by that? Everyone said I should be Prime Minister. Shouldn't I have been Prime Minister, Clive?

C.-C. It was certainly the general expectation.

PORTEOUS. I was the most promising young man of my day. I was bound to get a seat in the Cabinet at the next election.

LADY KITTY. They'd have found you out just as I've found you out. I'm sick of hearing that I ruined your career. You never had a career to ruin. Prime Minister. You haven't the brain. You haven't the character.

C.-C. Cheek, push, and a gift of the gab will serve you well instead, you know.

LADY KITTY. Besides, in politics it's not the men that matter. It's the women at the back of them. I could have made Clive a Cabinet Minister if I'd wanted to.

PORTEOUS. Clive?

LADY KITTY. With my beauty, my charm, my force of character, my wit, I could have done anything.

PORTEOUS. Clive was nothing but my political secretary. When I was Prime Minister I might have made him Governor of some Colony or other. Western Australia, say. Out of pure kindliness.

LADY KITTY [*with flashing eyes*]. D'you think I would have buried myself in Western Australia? With my beauty? My charm?

PORTEOUS. Or Barbadoes, perhaps.

LADY KITTY [*furiously*]. Barbadoes! Barbadoes can go to — Barbadoes.

PORTEOUS. That's all you'd have got.

LADY KITTY. Nonsense! I'd have India.

PORTEOUS. I would never have given you India.

LADY KITTY. You would have given me India.

PORTEOUS. I tell you I wouldn't.

LADY KITTY. The King would given me India. The nation would have insisted on my having India. I would have been a vice-reine or nothing.

PORTEOUS. I tell you that as long as the interests of the British Empire — Damn it all, my teeth are coming out!

[*He hurries from the room.*]

LADY KITTY. It's too much. I can't bear it any more. I've put up with him for thirty years and now I'm at the end of my tether.

C.-C. Calm yourself, my dear Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I won't listen to a word. I've quite made up my mind. It's finished, finished, finished. [*With a change of tone.*] I was so touched when I heard that you never lived in this house again after I left it.

C.-C. The cuckoos have always been very plentiful. Their note has a personal application which, I must say, I have found extremely offensive.

LADY KITTY. When I saw that you didn't marry again I couldn't help thinking that you still loved me.

C.-C. I am one of the few men I know who is able to profit by experience.

LADY KITTY. In the eyes of the Church I am still your wife. The Church is so wise. It knows that in the end a woman always comes back to her first love. Clive, I am willing to return to you.

C.-C. My dear Kitty, I couldn't take advantage of your momentary vexation with Hughie to let you take a step which I know you would bitterly regret.

LADY KITTY. You've waited for me a long time. For Arnold's sake.

C.-C. Do you think we really need bother about Arnold? In the last thirty years he's had time to grow used to the situation.

LADY KITTY [*with a smile*]. I think I've sown my wild oats, Clive.

C.-C. I haven't. I was a good young man, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I know.

C.-C. And I'm very glad, because it has enabled me to be a wicked old one.

LADY KITTY. I beg your pardon.

[ARNOLD *comes in with a large book in his hand.*]

ARNOLD. I say, I've found the book I was hunting for. Oh! isn't Lord Porteous here?

LADY KITTY. One moment, Arnold. Your father and I are busy.

ARNOLD. I'm so sorry.

[*He goes out into the garden.*]

LADY KITTY. Explain yourself, Clive.

C.-C. When you ran away from me, Kitty, I was sore and angry and miserable. But above all I felt a fool.

LADY KITTY. Men are so vain.

C.-C. But I was a student of history, and presently I reflected that I shared my misfortune with very nearly all the greatest men.

LADY KITTY. I'm a great reader myself. It has always struck me as peculiar.

C.-C. The explanation is very simple. Women dislike intelligence, and when they find it in their husbands they revenge themselves on them in the only way they can, by making them — well, what you made me.

LADY KITTY. It's ingenious. It may be true.

C.-C. I felt I had done my duty by society and I determined to devote the rest of my life to my own entertainment. The House of Commons had always bored me excessively and the scandal of our divorce gave me an opportunity to resign my seat. I have been relieved to find that the country got on perfectly well without me.

LADY KITTY. But has love never entered your life?

C.-C. Tell me frankly, Kitty, don't you think people make a lot of unnecessary fuss about love?

LADY KITTY. It's the most wonderful thing in the world.

C.-C. You're incorrigible. Do you really think it was worth sacrificing so much for?

LADY KITTY. My dear Clive, I don't mind telling you that if I had my time over again I should be unfaithful to you, but I should not leave you.

C.-C. For some years I was notoriously the prey of a secret sorrow. But I found so many charming creatures who were anxious to console that in the end it grew rather fatiguing. Out of regard to my health I ceased to frequent the drawing-rooms of Mayfair.

LADY KITTY. And since then?

C.-C. Since then I have allowed myself the luxury of assisting financially a succession of dear little things, in a somewhat humble sphere, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five.

LADY KITTY. I cannot understand the infatuation of men for young girls. I think they're so dull.

C.-C. It's a matter of taste. I love old wine, old friends, and old books, but I like young women. On their twenty-fifth birthday I give them a diamond ring and tell them they must no longer waste their youth and beauty on an old fogey like me. We have a most affecting scene, my technique on these occasions is perfect, and then I start all over again.

LADY KITTY. You're a wicked old man, Clive.

C.-C. That's what I told you. But, by George! I'm a happy one.

LADY KITTY. There's only one course open to me now.

C.-C. What is that?

LADY KITTY [*with a flashing smile*]. To go and dress for dinner.

C.-C. Capital. I will follow your example.

[*As* LADY KITTY *goes out* ELIZABETH *comes in.*]

ELIZABETH. Where is Arnold?

C.-C. He's on the terrace. I'll call him.

ELIZABETH. Don't bother.

C.-C. I was just strolling along to my cottage to put on a dinner jacket. [*As he goes out.*] Arnold.

[*Exit* C.-C.]

ARNOLD. Hulloa! [*He comes in.*] Oh, Elizabeth, I've found an illustration here of a chair which is almost identical with mine. It's dated 1750. Look!

ELIZABETH. That's very interesting.

ARNOLD. I want to show it to Porteous. [*Moving a chair which has been misplaced.*] You know, it does exasperate me the way people will not leave things alone. I no sooner put a thing in its place than somebody moves it.

ELIZABETH. It must be maddening for you.

ARNOLD. It is. You are the worst offender. I can't think why you don't take the pride that I do in the house. After all, it's one of the show places in the county.

ELIZABETH. I'm afraid you find me very unsatisfactory.

ARNOLD [*good-humoredly*]. I don't know about that. But my two subjects are politics and decoration. I should be a perfect fool if I didn't see that you don't care two straws about either.

ELIZABETH. We haven't very much in common, Arnold, have we?

ARNOLD. I don't think you can blame me for that.

ELIZABETH. I don't. I blame you for nothing. I have no fault to find with you.

ARNOLD [*surprised at her significant tone*]. Good gracious me! what's the meaning of all this?

ELIZABETH. Well, I don't think there's any object in beating about the bush. I want you to let me go.

ARNOLD. Go where?

ELIZABETH. Away. For always.

ARNOLD. My dear child, what *are* you talking about?

ELIZABETH. I want to be free.

ARNOLD [*amused rather than disconcerted*]. Don't be ridiculous, darling. I daresay you're run down and want a change. I'll take you over to Paris for a fortnight if you like.

ELIZABETH. I shouldn't have spoken to you if I hadn't quite made up my

mind. We've been married for three years and I don't think it's been a great success. I'm frankly bored by the life you want me to lead.

ARNOLD. Well, if you'll allow me to say so, the fault is yours. We lead a very distinguished, useful life. We know a lot of extremely nice people.

ELIZABETH. I'm quite willing to allow that the fault is mine. But how does that make it any better? I'm only twenty-five. If I've made a mistake, I have time to correct it.

ARNOLD. I can't bring myself to take you very seriously.

ELIZABETH. You see, I don't love you.

ARNOLD. Well, I'm awfully sorry. But you weren't obliged to marry me. You've made your bed and I'm afraid you must lie on it.

ELIZABETH. That's one of the falsest proverbs in the English language. Why should you lie on the bed you've made if you don't want to? There's always the floor.

ARNOLD. For goodness' sake don't be funny, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I've quite made up my mind to leave you, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Come, come, Elizabeth, you must be sensible. You haven't any reason to leave me.

ELIZABETH. Why should you wish to keep a woman tied to you who wants to be free?

ARNOLD. I happen to be in love with you.

ELIZABETH. You might have said that before.

ARNOLD. I thought you'd take it for granted. You can't expect a man to go on making love to his wife after three years. I'm very busy. I'm awfully keen on politics and I've worked like a dog to make this house a thing of beauty. After all, a man marries to have a home, but also because he doesn't want to be bothered with sex and all that sort of thing. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you and I've been in love ever since.

ELIZABETH. I'm sorry, but if you're not in love with a man his love doesn't mean very much to you.

ARNOLD. It's so ungrateful. I've done everything in the world for you.

ELIZABETH. You've been very kind to me. But you've asked me to lead a life I don't like and that I'm not suited for. I'm awfully sorry to cause you pain, but now you must let me go.

ARNOLD. Nonsense! I'm a good deal older than you are and I think I have a little more sense. In your interests as well as in mine I'm not going to do anything of the sort.

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. How can you prevent me? You can't keep me under lock and key.

ARNOLD. Please don't talk to me as if I were a foolish child. You're my wife and you're going to remain my wife.

ELIZABETH. What sort of a life do you think we should lead? Do you think there'd be any more happiness for you than for me?

ARNOLD. But what is it precisely that you suggest?

ELIZABETH. Well, I want you to let me divorce you.

ARNOLD [*astounded*]. Me? Thank you very much. Are you under the impression I'm going to sacrifice my career for a whim of yours?

ELIZABETH. How will it do that?

ARNOLD. My seat's wobbly enough as it is. Do you think I'd be able to hold it if I were in a divorce case? Even if it were a put-up job, as most divorces are nowadays, it would damn me.

ELIZABETH. It's rather hard on a woman to be divorced.

ARNOLD [*with sudden suspicion*]. What do you mean by that? Are you in love with some one?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

ARNOLD. Who?

ELIZABETH. Teddie Luton.

[*He is astonished for a moment, then bursts into a laugh.*]

ARNOLD. My poor child, how can you be so ridiculous? Why, he hasn't a bob. He's a perfectly commonplace young man. It's so absurd I can't even be angry with you.

ELIZABETH. I've fallen desperately in love with him, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Well, you'd better fall desperately out.

ELIZABETH. He wants to marry me.

ARNOLD. I daresay he does. He can go to hell.

ELIZABETH. It's no good talking like that.

ARNOLD. Is he your lover?

ELIZABETH. No, certainly not.

ARNOLD. It shows that he's a mean skunk to take advantage of my hospitality to make love to you.

ELIZABETH. He's never even kissed me.

ARNOLD. I'd try telling that to the horse marines if I were you.

ELIZABETH. It's because I wanted to do nothing shabby that I told you straight out how things were.

ARNOLD. How long have you been thinking of this?

ELIZABETH. I've been in love with Teddie ever since I knew him.

ARNOLD. And you never thought of me at all, I suppose.

ELIZABETH. Oh, yes, I did. I was miserable. But I can't help myself. I wish I loved you, but I don't.

ARNOLD. I recommend you to think very carefully before you do anything foolish.

ELIZABETH. I have thought very carefully.

ARNOLD. By God! I don't know why I don't give you a sound hiding. I'm not sure if that wouldn't be the best thing to bring you to your senses.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, don't take it like that.

ARNOLD. How do you expect me to take it? You come to me quite calmly and say: "I've had enough of you. We've been married three years and I think I'd like to marry somebody else now. Shall I break up your home? What a bore for you! Do you mind my divorcing you! It'll smash up your career, will it! What a pity!" Oh, no, my girl, I may be a fool, but I'm not a damned fool.

ELIZABETH. Teddie is leaving here by the first train to-morrow. I warn you that I mean to join him as soon as he can make the necessary arrangements.

ARNOLD. Where is he?

ELIZABETH. I don't know. I suppose he's in his room.

[ARNOLD *goes to the door and calls.*]

ARNOLD. George!

[*For a moment he walks up and down the room impatiently.* ELIZABETH *watches him. The* FOOTMAN *comes in.*]

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir.

ARNOLD. Tell Mr. Luton to come here at once.

ELIZABETH. Ask Mr. Luton if he wouldn't mind coming here for a moment.

FOOTMAN. Very good, madam.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.]

ELIZABETH. What are you going to say to him?

ARNOLD. That's my business.

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't make a scene if I were you.

ARNOLD. I'm not going to make a scene. [*They wait in silence.*] Why did you insist on my mother coming here?

ELIZABETH. It seemed to me rather absurd to take up the attitude that I should be contaminated by her when . . .

ARNOLD [*interrupting*]. When you were proposing to do exactly the same thing. Well, now you've seen her what do you think of her? Do you think it's been a success? Is that the sort of woman a man would like his mother to be?

ELIZABETH. I've been ashamed. I've been so sorry. It all seemed dreadful and horrible. This morning I happened to notice a rose in the garden. It was all overblown and bedraggled. It looked like a painted old woman. And I remembered that I'd looked at it a day or two ago. It was lovely then, fresh and blooming and fragrant. It may be hideous now, but that doesn't take away from the beauty it had once. That was real.

ARNOLD. Poetry, by God! As if this were the moment for poetry!

[TEDDIE *comes in. He has changed into a dinner jacket.*]

TEDDIE [*to* ELIZABETH]. Did you want me?

ARNOLD. *I* sent for you. [TEDDIE *looks from* ARNOLD *to* ELIZABETH. *He sees that something has happened.*] When would it be convenient for you to leave this house?

TEDDIE. I was proposing to go to-morrow morning. But I can very well go at once if you like.

ARNOLD. I do like.

TEDDIE. Very well. Is there anything else you wish to say to me?

ARNOLD. Do you think it was a very honorable thing to come down here and make love to my wife?

TEDDIE. No, I don't. I haven't been very happy about it. That's why I wanted to go away.

ARNOLD. Upon my word, you're cool.

TEDDIE. I'm afraid it's no good saying I'm sorry and that sort of thing. You know what the situation is.

ARNOLD. Is it true that you want to marry Elizabeth?

TEDDIE. Yes. I should like to marry her as soon as ever I can.

ARNOLD. Have you thought of me at all? Has it struck you that you're destroying my home and breaking up my happiness?

TEDDIE. I don't see how there could be much happiness for you if Elizabeth doesn't care for you.

ARNOLD. Let me tell you that I refuse to have my home broken up by a two penny-halfpenny adventurer who takes advantage of a foolish woman. I refuse to allow myself to be divorced. I can't prevent my wife from going off with you if she's determined to make a damned fool of herself, but this I tell you: nothing will induce me to divorce her.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, that would be monstrous.

TEDDIE. We could force you.

ARNOLD. How?

TEDDIE. If we went away together openly, you'd have to bring an action.

ARNOLD. Twenty-four hours after you leave this house I shall go down to Brighton with a chorus-girl. And neither you nor I will be able to get a divorce. We've had enough divorces in our family. And now get out, get out, get out!

[TEDDIE *looks uncertainly at* ELIZABETH.]

ELIZABETH [*with a little smile*]. Don't bother about me. I shall be all right.

ARNOLD. Get out! Get out!

ACT III

The scene is the same as in the preceding Acts. It is the night of the same day as that on which takes place the action of the second Act.

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *and* ARNOLD, *both in dinner jackets, are discovered.* CHAMPION-CHENEY *is seated.* ARNOLD *walks restlessly up and down the room.*]

C.-C. I think, if you'll follow my advice to the letter, you'll probably work the trick.

ARNOLD. I don't like it, you know. It's against all my principles.

C.-C. My dear Arnold, we all hope that you have before you a distinguished political career. You can't learn too soon that the most useful thing about a principle is that it can always be sacrificed to expediency.

ARNOLD. But supposing it doesn't come off? Women are incalculable.

C.-C. Nonsense! Men are romantic. A woman will always sacrifice herself if you give her the opportunity. It is her favorite form of self-indulgence.

ARNOLD. I never know whether you're a humorist or a cynic, father.

C.-C. I'm neither, my dear boy; I'm merely a very truthful man. But people are so unused to the truth that they're apt to mistake it for a joke or a sneer.

ARNOLD [*irritably*]. It seems so unfair that this should happen to me.

C.-C. Keep your head, my boy, and do what I tell you.

[LADY KITTY *and* ELIZABETH *come in.* LADY KITTY *is in a gorgeous evening gown.*]

ELIZABETH. Where is Lord Porteous?

C.-C. He's on the terrace. He's smoking a cigar. [*Going to window.*] Hughie! [PORTEOUS *comes in.*]

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Yes? Where's Mrs. Shenstone?

ELIZABETH. Oh, she had a headache. She's gone to bed.

[*When* PORTEOUS *comes in* LADY KITTY *with a very haughty air purses her lips and takes up an illustrated paper.* PORTEOUS *gives her an irritated look, takes another illustrated paper and sits himself down at the other end of the room. They are not on speaking terms.*]

C.-C. Arnold and I have just been down to my cottage.

ELIZABETH. I wondered where you'd gone.

C.-C. I came across an old photograph album this afternoon. I meant to bring it along before dinner, but I forgot, so we went and fetched it.

ELIZABETH. Oh, do let me see it! I love old photographs.

[*He gives her the album, and she, sitting down, puts it on her knees and begins to turn over the pages. He stands over her.* LADY KITTY *and* PORTEOUS *take surreptitious glances at one another.*]

C.-C. I thought it might amuse you to see what pretty women looked like five and thirty years ago. That was the day of beautiful women.

ELIZABETH. Do you think they were more beautiful then than they are now?

C.-C. Oh, much. Now you see lots of pretty little things, but very few beautiful women.

ELIZABETH. Aren't their clothes funny?

C.-C. [*pointing to a photograph*]. That's Mrs. Langtry.

ELIZABETH. She has a lovely nose.

C.-C. She was the most wonderful thing you ever saw. Dowagers used to jump on chairs in order to get a good look at her when she came into a drawing-room. I was riding with her once, and we had to have the gates of the livery stable closed when she was getting on her horse because the crowd was so great.

ELIZABETH. And who's that?

C.-C. Lady Lonsdale. That's Lady Dudley.

ELIZABETH. This is an actress, isn't it?

C.-C. It is, indeed. Ellen Terry. By George! how I loved that woman!

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. Dear Ellen Terry!

C.-C. That's Bwabs. I never saw a smarter man in my life. And Oliver Montagu. Henry Manners with his eyeglass.

ELIZABETH. Nice-looking, isn't he? And this?

C.-C. That's Mary Anderson. I wish you could have seen her in *A Winter's Tale.* Her beauty just took your breath away. And look! There's Lady Randolph. Bernal Osborne — the wittiest man I ever knew.

ELIZABETH. I think it's too sweet. I love their absurd bustles and those tight sleeves.

C.-C. What figures they had! In those days a woman wasn't supposed to be as thin as a rail and as flat as a pancake.

ELIZABETH. Oh, but aren't they laced in? How could they bear it?

C.-C. They didn't play golf then, and nonsense like that, you know. They hunted, in a tall hat and a long black habit, and they were very gracious and charitable to the poor in the village.

ELIZABETH. Did the poor like it?

C.-C. They had a very thin time if they didn't. When they were in London they drove in the Park every afternoon, and they went to ten-course dinners, where they never met anybody they didn't know. And they had their box at the opera when Patti was singing or Madame Albani.

ELIZABETH. Oh, what a lovely little thing! Who on earth is that?

C.-C. That?

ELIZABETH. She looks so fragile, like a piece of exquisite china, with all those furs on and her face up against her muff, and the snow falling.

C.-C. Yes, there was quite a rage at

that time for being taken in an artificial snowstorm.

ELIZABETH. What a sweet smile, so roguish and frank, and debonair! Oh, I wish I looked like that! Do tell me who it is!

C.-C. Don't you know?

ELIZABETH. No.

C.-C. Why — it's Kitty.

ELIZABETH. Lady Kitty! [*To* LADY KITTY.] Oh, my dear, do look! It's too ravishing. [*She takes the album over to her impulsively.*] Why didn't you tell me you looked like that? Everybody must have been in love with you.

[LADY KITTY *takes the album and looks at it. Then she lets it slip from her hands and covers her face with her hands. She is crying*].

ELIZABETH [*in consternation*]. My dear, what's the matter? Oh, what have I done? I'm so sorry.

LADY KITTY. Don't, don't talk to me. Leave me alone. It's stupid of me.

[ELIZABETH *looks at her for a moment perplexed, then, turning round, slips her arm in* CHAMPION-CHENEY'S *and leads him out on to the terrace.*]

ELIZABETH [*as they are going, in a whisper*]. Did you do that on purpose?

[PORTEOUS *gets up and goes over to* LADY KITTY. *He puts his hand on her shoulder. They remain thus for a little while.*]

PORTEOUS. I'm afraid I was very rude to you before dinner, Kitty.

LADY KITTY [*taking his hand which is on her shoulder*]. It doesn't matter. I'm sure I was very exasperating.

PORTEOUS. I didn't mean what I said, you know.

LADY KITTY. Neither did I.

PORTEOUS. Of course I know that I'd never have been Prime Minister.

LADY KITTY. How can you talk such nonsense, Hughie? No one would have had a chance if you'd remained in politics.

PORTEOUS. I haven't the character.

LADY KITTY. You have more character than anyone I've ever met.

PORTEOUS. Besides, I don't know that I much wanted to be Prime Minister.

LADY KITTY. Oh, but I should have been so proud of you. Of course you'd have been Prime Minister.

PORTEOUS. I'd have given you India, you know. I think it would have been a very popular appointment.

LADY KITTY. I don't care twopence about India. I'd have been quite content with Western Australia.

PORTEOUS. My dear, you don't think I'd have let you bury yourself in Western Australia?

LADY KITTY. Or Barbadoes.

PORTEOUS. Never. It sounds like a cure for flat feet. I'd have kept you in London.

[*He picks up the album and is about to look at the photograph of Lady* KITTY. *She puts her hand over it.*]

LADY KITTY. No, don't look.

[*He takes her hand away.*]

PORTEOUS. Don't be so silly.

LADY KITTY. Isn't it hateful to grow old?

PORTEOUS. You know, you haven't changed much.

LADY KITTY [*enchanted*]. Oh, Hughie, how can you talk such nonsense?

PORTEOUS. Of course you're a little more mature, but that's all. A woman's all the better for being rather mature.

LADY KITTY. Do you really think that?

PORTEOUS. Upon my soul I do.

LADY KITTY. You're not saying it just to please me?

PORTEOUS. No, no.

LADY KITTY. Let me look at the photograph again. [*She takes the album and looks at the photograph complacently.*] The fact is, if your bones are good, age doesn't really matter. You'll always be beautiful.

PORTEOUS [*with a little smile, almost as if he were talking to a child*]. It was silly of you to cry.

LADY KITTY. It hasn't made my eyelashes run, has it?

PORTEOUS. Not a bit.

LADY KITTY. It's very good stuff I use now. They don't stick together either.

PORTEOUS. Look here, Kitty, how much longer do you want to stay here?

LADY KITTY. Oh, I'm quite ready to go whenever you like.

PORTEOUS. Clive gets on my nerves. I

don't like the way he keeps hanging about you.

LADY KITTY [*surprised, rather amused, and delighted*]. Hughie, you don't mean to say you're jealous of poor Clive?

PORTEOUS. Of course I'm not jealous of him, but he does look at you in a way that I can't help thinking rather objectionable.

LADY KITTY. Hughie, you may throw me downstairs like Amy Robsart; you may drag me about the floor by the hair of my head; I don't care, you're jealous. I shall never grow old.

PORTEOUS. Damn it all, the man was your husband.

LADY KITTY. My dear Hughie, he never had your style. Why, the moment you come into a room everyone looks and says: "Who the devil is that?"

PORTEOUS. What? You think that, do you? Well, I daresay there's something in what you say. These damned Radicals can say what they like, but, by God, Kitty! when a man's a gentleman — well, damn it all, you know what I mean.

LADY KITTY. I think Clive has degenerated dreadfully since we left him.

PORTEOUS. What do you say to making a bee-line for Italy and going to San Michele?

LADY KITTY. Oh, Hughie! It's years since we were there.

PORTEOUS. Wouldn't you like to see it again — just once more?

LADY KITTY. Do you remember the first time we went? It was the most heavenly place I'd ever seen. We'd only left England a month, and I said I'd like to spend all my life there.

PORTEOUS. Of course I remember. And in a fortnight it was yours, lock, stock and barrel.

LADY KITTY. We were very happy there, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Let's go back once more.

LADY KITTY. I daren't. It must be all peopled with the ghosts of our past. One should never go again to a place where one has been happy. It would break my heart.

PORTEOUS. Do you remember how we used to sit on the terrace of the old castle and look at the Adriatic? We might have been the only people in the world, you and I, Kitty.

LADY KITTY [*tragically*]. And we thought our love would last forever.

[*Enter* CHAMPION-CHENEY.]

PORTEOUS. Is there any chance of bridge this evening?

C.-C. I don't think we can make up a four.

PORTEOUS. What a nuisance that boy went away like that? He wasn't a bad player.

C.-C. Teddie Luton?

LADY KITTY. I think it was very funny his going without saying good-bye to anyone.

C.-C. The young men of the present day are very casual.

PORTEOUS. I thought there was no train in the evening.

C.-C. There isn't. The last train leaves at 5:45.

PORTEOUS. How did he go then?

C.-C. He went.

PORTEOUS. Damned selfish, I call it.

LADY KITTY [*intrigued*]. Why did he go, Clive?

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *looks at her for a moment reflectively.*]

C.-C. I have something very grave to say to you. Elizabeth wants to leave Arnold.

LADY KITTY. Clive! What on earth for?

C.-C. She's in love with Teddie Luton. That's why he went. The men of my family are really very unfortunate.

PORTEOUS. Does she want to run away with him?

LADY KITTY [*with consternation*]. My dear, what's to be done?

C.-C. I think you can do a great deal.

LADY KITTY. I? What?

C.-C. Tell her, tell her what it means.

[*He looks at her fixedly. She stares at him.*]

LADY KITTY. Oh, no, no!

C.-C. She's a child. Not for Arnold's sake. For her sake. You must.

LADY KITTY. You don't know what you're asking.

C.-C. Yes, I do.

LADY KITTY. Hughie, what shall I do?

PORTEOUS. Do what you like. I shall never blame you for anything.

[*The* FOOTMAN *comes in with a letter on a salver. He hesitates on seeing that* ELIZABETH *is not in the room.*]

C.-C. What is it?

FOOTMAN. I was looking for Mrs. Champion-Cheney, sir.

C.-C. She's not here. Is that a letter?

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir. It's just been sent up from the "Champion Arms."

C.-C. Leave it. I'll give it to Mrs. Cheney.

FOOTMAN. Very good, sir.

[*He brings the tray to* CLIVE, *who takes the letter. The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*]

PORTEOUS. Is the "Champion Arms" the local pub?

C.-C. [*looking at the letter*]. It's by way of being a hotel, but I never heard of anyone staying there.

LADY KITTY. If there was no train I suppose he had to go there.

C.-C. Great minds. I wonder what he has to write about! [*He goes to the door leading on to the garden.*] Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH [*outside*]. Yes.

C.-C. Here's a note for you.

[*There is silence. They wait for* ELIZABETH *to come. She enters.*]

ELIZABETH. It's lovely in the garden to-night.

C.-C. They've just sent this up from the "Champion Arms."

ELIZABETH. Thank you.

[*Without embarrassment she opens the letter. They watch her while she reads it. It covers three pages. She puts it away in her bag.*]

LADY KITTY. Hughie, I wish you'd fetch me a cloak. I'd like to take a little stroll in the garden, but after thirty years in Italy I find these English summers rather chilly. [*Without a word* PORTEOUS *goes out.* ELIZABETH *is lost in thought.*] I want to talk to Elizabeth, Clive.

C.-C. I'll leave you. [*He goes out.*]

LADY KITTY. What does he say?

ELIZABETH. Who?

LADY KITTY. Mr. Luton.

ELIZABETH [*gives a little start. Then she looks at* LADY KITTY]. They've told you?

LADY KITTY. Yes. And now they have I think I knew it all along.

ELIZABETH. I don't expect you to have much sympathy for me. Arnold is your son.

LADY KITTY. So pitifully little.

ELIZABETH. I'm not suited for this sort of existence. Arnold wants me to take what he calls my place in Society. Oh, I get so bored with those parties in London. All those middle-aged painted women, in beautiful clothes, lolloping round ballrooms with rather old young men. And the endless luncheons where they gossip about so-and-so's love affairs.

LADY KITTY. Are you very much in love with Mr. Luton?

ELIZABETH. I love him with all my heart.

LADY KITTY. And he?

ELIZABETH. He's never cared for anyone but me. He never will.

LADY KITTY. Will Arnold let you divorce him?

ELIZABETH. No, he won't hear of it. He refuses even to divorce me.

LADY KITTY. Why?

ELIZABETH. He thinks a scandal will revive all the old gossip.

LADY KITTY. Oh, my poor child!

ELIZABETH. It can't be helped. I'm quite willing to accept the consequences.

LADY KITTY. You don't know what it is to have a man tied to you only by his honor. When married people don't get on they can separate, but if they're not married it's impossible. It's a tie that only death can sever.

ELIZABETH. If Teddie stopped caring for me I shouldn't want him to stay with me for five minutes.

LADY KITTY. One says that when one's sure of a man's love, but when one isn't any more — oh, it's so different. In those circumstances one's got to keep a man's love. It's the only thing one has.

ELIZABETH. I'm a human being. I can stand on my own feet.

LADY KITTY. Have you any money of your own?

ELIZABETH. None.

LADY KITTY. Then how can you stand on your own feet? You think I'm a silly, frivolous woman, but I've learned something in a bitter school. They can make what laws they like, they can give us the suffrage, but when you come down to bed-rock it's the man who pays the piper who calls the tune. Woman will only be the equal of man when she earns her living in the same way that he does.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. It sounds rather funny to hear you talk like that.

LADY KITTY. A cook who marries a butler can snap her fingers in his face because she can earn just as much as he can. But a woman in your position and a woman in mine will always be dependent on the men who keep them.

ELIZABETH. I don't want luxury. You don't know how sick I am of all this beautiful furniture. These over-decorated houses are like a prison in which I can't breathe. When I drive about in a Callot frock and a Rolls-Royce I envy the shop-girl in a coat and skirt whom I see jumping on the tail-board of a bus.

LADY KITTY. You mean that if need be you could earn your own living?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

LADY KITTY. What could you be? A nurse or a typist. It's nonsense. Luxury saps a woman's nerve. And when she's known it once it becomes a necessity.

ELIZABETH. That depends on the woman.

LADY KITTY. When we're young we think we're different from everyone else, but when we grow a little older we discover we're all very much of a muchness.

ELIZABETH. You're very kind to take so much trouble about me.

LADY KITTY. It breaks my heart to think that you're going to make the same pitiful mistake that I made.

ELIZABETH. Oh, don't say it was that, don't, don't.

LADY KITTY. Look at me, Elizabeth, and look at Hughie. Do you think it's been a success? If I had my time over again do you think I'd do it again? Do you think he would?

ELIZABETH. You see, you don't know how much I love Teddie.

LADY KITTY. And do you think I didn't love Hughie? Do you think he didn't love me?

ELIZABETH. I'm sure he did.

LADY KITTY. Oh, of course in the beginning it was heavenly. We felt so brave and adventurous and we were so much in love. The first two years were wonderful. People cut me, you know, but I didn't mind. I thought love was everything. It *is* a little uncomfortable when you come upon an old friend and go towards her eagerly, so glad to see her, and are met with an icy stare.

ELIZABETH. Do you think friends like that are worth having?

LADY KITTY. Perhaps they're not very sure of themselves. Perhaps they're honestly shocked. It's a test one had better not put one's friends to if one can help it. It's rather bitter to find how few one has.

ELIZABETH. But one has some.

LADY KITTY. Yes, they ask you to come and see them when they're quite certain no one will be there who might object to meeting you. Or else they say to you: "My dear, you know I'm devoted to you, and I wouldn't mind at all, but my girl's growing up — I'm sure you understand; you won't think it unkind of me if I don't ask you to the house?"

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. That doesn't seem to me very serious.

LADY KITTY. At first I thought it rather a relief, because it threw Hughie and me together more. But you know, men are very funny. Even when they are in love they're not in love all day long. They want change and recreation.

ELIZABETH. I'm not inclined to blame them for that, poor dears.

LADY KITTY. Then we settled in Flor-

ence. And because we couldn't get the society we'd been used to we became used to the society we could get. Loose women and vicious men. Snobs who like to patronize people with a handle to their names. Vague Italian Princes who were glad to borrow a few francs from Hughie and seedy countesses who liked to drive with me in the Cascine. And then Hughie began to hanker after his old life. He wanted to go big game shooting, but I dared not let him go. I was afraid he'd never come back.

ELIZABETH. But you knew he loved you.

LADY KITTY. Oh, my dear, what a blessed institution marriage is — for women, and what fools they are to meddle with it! The Church is so wise to take its stand on the indi — indi —

ELIZABETH. Solu —

LADY KITTY. Bility of marriage. Believe me, it's no joke when you have to rely only on yourself to keep a man. I could never afford to grow old. My dear, I'll tell you a secret that I've never told a living soul.

ELIZABETH. What is that?

LADY KITTY. My hair is not naturally this color.

ELIZABETH. Really.

LADY KITTY. I touch it up. You would never have guessed, would you?

ELIZABETH. Never.

LADY KITTY. Nobody does. My dear, it's white, prematurely of course, but white. I always think it's a symbol of my life. Are you interested in symbolism? I think it's too wonderful.

ELIZABETH. I don't think I know very much about it.

LADY KITTY. However tired I've been I've had to be brilliant and gay. I've never let Hughie see the aching heart behind my smiling eyes.

ELIZABETH [*amused and touched*]. You poor dear.

LADY KITTY. And when I saw he was attracted by some one else the fear and the jealousy that seized me! You see, I didn't dare make a scene as I should have done if I'd been married — I had to pretend not to notice.

ELIZABETH [*taken aback*]. But do you mean to say he fell in love with anyone else?

LADY KITTY. Of course he did eventually.

ELIZABETH [*hardly knowing what to say*]. You must have been very unhappy.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I was, dreadfully. Night after night I sobbed my heart out when Hughie told me he was going to play cards at the club and I knew he was with that odious woman. Of course, it wasn't as if there weren't plenty of men who were only too anxious to console me. Men have always been attracted by me, you know.

ELIZABETH. Oh, of course, I can quite understand it.

LADY KITTY. But I had my self-respect to think of. I felt that whatever Hughie did I would do nothing that I should regret.

ELIZABETH. You must be very glad now.

LADY KITTY. Oh, yes. Notwithstanding all my temptations I've been absolutely faithful to Hughie in spirit.

ELIZABETH. I don't think I quite understand what you mean.

LADY KITTY. Well, there was a poor Italian boy, young Count Castel Giovanni, who was so desperately in love with me that his mother begged me not to be too cruel. She was afraid he'd go into a consumption. What could I do? And then, oh, years later, there was Antonio Melita. He said he'd shoot himself unless I — well, you understand I couldn't let the poor boy shoot himself.

ELIZABETH. D'you think he really would have shot himself?

LADY KITTY. Oh, one never knows, you know. Those Italians are so passionate. He was really rather a lamb. He had such beautiful eyes.

[ELIZABETH *looks at her for a long time and a certain horror seizes her of this dissolute, painted old woman.*]

ELIZABETH [*hoarsely*]. Oh, but I think that's — dreadful.

LADY KITTY. Are you shocked? One sacrifices one's life for love and then one

finds that love doesn't last. The tragedy of love isn't death or separation. One gets over them. The tragedy of love is indifference.

[ARNOLD *comes in.*]

ARNOLD. Can I have a little talk with you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. Of course.

ARNOLD. Shall we go for a stroll in the garden?

ELIZABETH. If you like.

LADY KITTY. No, stay here. I'm going out anyway. [*Exit* LADY KITTY.]

ARNOLD. I want you to listen to me for a few minutes, Elizabeth. I was so taken aback by what you told me just now that I lost my head. I was rather absurd and I beg your pardon. I said things I regret.

ELIZABETH. Oh, don't blame yourself. I'm sorry that I should have given you occasion to say them.

ARNOLD. I want to ask you if you've quite made up your mind to go.

ELIZABETH. Quite.

ARNOLD. Just now I seem to have said all that I didn't want to say and nothing that I did. I'm stupid and tongue-tied. I never told you how deeply I loved you.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold!

ARNOLD. Please let me speak now. It's so very difficult. If I seemed absorbed in politics and the house, and so on, to the exclusion of my interest in you, I'm dreadfully sorry. I suppose it was absurd of me to think you would take my great love for granted.

ELIZABETH. But, Arnold, I'm not reproaching you.

ARNOLD. I'm reproaching myself. I've been tactless and neglectful. But I do ask you to believe that it hasn't been because I didn't love you. Can you forgive me?

ELIZABETH. I don't think that there's anything to forgive.

ARNOLD. It wasn't till to-day when you talked of leaving me that I realized how desperately in love with you I was.

ELIZABETH. After three years?

ARNOLD. I'm so proud of you. I admire you so much. When I see you at a party, so fresh and lovely, and everybody wondering at you, I have a sort of little thrill because you're mine, and afterwards I shall take you home.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, you're exaggerating.

ARNOLD. I can't imagine this house without you. Life seems on a sudden all empty and meaningless. Oh, Elizabeth, don't you love me at all?

ELIZABETH. It's much better to be honest. No.

ARNOLD. Doesn't my love mean anything to you?

ELIZABETH. I'm very grateful to you. I'm sorry to cause you pain. What would be the good of my staying with you when I should be wretched all the time?

ARNOLD. Do you love that man as much as all that? Does my unhappiness mean nothing to you?

ELIZABETH. Of course it does. It breaks my heart. You see, I never knew I meant so much to you. I'm so touched. And I'm so sorry, Arnold, really sorry. But I can't help myself.

ARNOLD. Poor child, it's cruel of me to torture you.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, believe me, I have tried to make the best of it. I've tried to love you, but I can't. After all, one either loves or one doesn't. Trying is no help. And now I'm at the end of my tether. I can't help the consequences—I must do what my whole self yearns for.

ARNOLD. My poor child, I'm so afraid you'll be unhappy. I'm so afraid you'll regret.

ELIZABETH. You must leave me to my fate. I hope you'll forget me and all the unhappiness I've caused you.

ARNOLD [*there is a pause.* ARNOLD *walks up and down the room reflectively. He stops and faces her.*] If you love this man and want to go to him I'll do nothing to prevent you. My only wish is to do what is best for you.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, that's awfully kind of you. If I'm treating you badly, at least I want you to know that I'm grateful for all your kindness to me.

ARNOLD. But there's one favor I should like you to do me. Will you?

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, of course I'll do anything I can.

ARNOLD. Teddie hasn't very much money. You've been used to a certain amount of luxury, and I can't bear to think that you should do without anything you've had. It would kill me to think that you were suffering any hardship or privation.

ELIZABETH. Oh, but Teddie can earn enough for our needs. After all, we don't want much money.

ARNOLD. I'm afraid my mother's life hasn't been very easy, but it's obvious that the only thing that's made it possible is that Porteous was rich. I want you to let me make you an allowance of two thousand a year.

ELIZABETH. Oh, no, I couldn't think of it. It's absurd.

ARNOLD. I beg you to accept it. You don't know what a difference it will make.

ELIZABETH. It's awfully kind of you, Arnold. It humiliates me to speak about it. Nothing would induce me to take a penny from you.

ARNOLD. Well, you can't prevent me from opening an account at my bank in your name. The money shall be paid in every quarter whether you touch it or not, and if you happen to want it, it will be there waiting for you.

ELIZABETH. You overwhelm me, Arnold. There's only one thing I want you to do for me. I should be very grateful if you would divorce me as soon as you possibly can.

ARNOLD. No, I won't do that. But I'll give you cause to divorce me.

ELIZABETH. You!

ARNOLD. Yes. But of course you'll have to be very careful for a bit. I'll put it through as quickly as possible, but I'm afraid you can't hope to be free for over six months.

ELIZABETH. But, Arnold, your seat and your political career!

ARNOLD. Oh, well, my father gave up his seat under similar circumstances. He's got along very comfortably without politics.

ELIZABETH. But they're your whole life.

ARNOLD. After all one can't have it both ways. You can't serve God and Mammon. If you want to do the decent thing you have to be prepared to suffer for it.

ELIZABETH. But I don't want you to suffer for it.

ARNOLD. At first I rather hesitated at the scandal. But I daresay that was only weakness on my part. Under the circumstances I should have liked to keep out of the Divorce Court if I could.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, you're making me absolutely miserable.

ARNOLD. What you said before dinner was quite right. It's nothing for a man, but it makes so much difference to a woman. Naturally I must think of you first.

ELIZABETH. That's absurd. It's out of the question. Whatever there's to pay I must pay it.

ARNOLD. It's not very much I'm asking you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I'm taking everything from you.

ARNOLD. It's the only condition I make. My mind is absolutely made up. I will never divorce you, but I will enable you to divorce me.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, it's cruel to be so generous.

ARNOLD. It's not generous at all. It's the only way I have of showing you how deep and passionate and sincere my love is for you. [*There is a silence. He holds out his hand.*] Good-night. I have a great deal of work to do before I go to bed.

ELIZABETH. Good-night.

ARNOLD. Do you mind if I kiss you?

ELIZABETH [*with agony*]. Oh, Arnold!

[*He gravely kisses her on the forehead and then goes out.* ELIZABETH *stands lost in thought. She is shattered.*]

[LADY KITTY *and* PORTEOUS *come in.* LADY KITTY *wears a cloak.*]

LADY KITTY. You're alone, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. That note you asked me about, Lady Kitty, from Teddie . . .

LADY KITTY. Yes?

ELIZABETH. He wanted to have a talk with me before he went away. He's waiting for me in the summer house by the tennis court. Would Lord Porteous mind going down and asking him to come here?

PORTEOUS. Certainly. Certainly.

ELIZABETH. Forgive me for troubling you. But it's very important.

PORTEOUS. No trouble at all.

[*He goes out.*]

LADY KITTY. Hughie and I will leave you alone.

ELIZABETH. But I don't want to be left alone. I want you to stay.

LADY KITTY. What are you going to say to him?

ELIZABETH [*desperately*]. Please don't ask me questions. I'm so frightfully unhappy.

LADY KITTY. My poor child!

ELIZABETH. Oh, isn't life rotten? Why can't one be happy without making other people unhappy?

LADY KITTY. I wish I knew how to help you. I'm simply devoted to you. [*She hunts about in her mind for something to do or say.*] Would you like my lip-stick?

ELIZABETH [*smiling through her tears*]. Thanks. I never use one.

LADY KITTY. Oh, but just try. It's such a comfort when you're in trouble.

[*Enter* PORTEOUS *and* TEDDIE.]

PORTEOUS. I brought him. He said he'd be damned if he'd come.

LADY KITTY. When a lady sent for him? Are these the manners of the young men of to-day?

TEDDIE. When you've been solemnly kicked out of a house once I think it seems rather pushing to come back again as though nothing had happened.

ELIZABETH. Teddie, I want you to be serious.

TEDDIE. Darling, I had such a rotten dinner at that pub. If you ask me to be serious on the top of that I shall cry.

ELIZABETH. Don't be idiotic, Teddie. [*Her voice faltering.*] I'm so utterly wretched.

[*He looks at her for a moment gravely.*]

TEDDIE. What is it?

ELIZABETH. I can't come away with you, Teddie.

TEDDIE. Why not?

ELIZABETH [*looking away in embarrassment*]. I don't love you enough.

TEDDIE. Fiddle!

ELIZABETH [*with a flash of anger*]. Don't say "Fiddle" to me.

TEDDIE. I shall say exactly what I like to you.

ELIZABETH. I won't be bullied.

TEDDIE. Now look here, Elizabeth, you know perfectly well that I'm in love with you, and I know perfectly well that you're in love with me. So what are you talking nonsense for?

ELIZABETH [*her voice breaking*]. I can't say it if you're cross with me.

TEDDIE [*smiling very tenderly*]. I'm not cross with, you, silly.

ELIZABETH. It's harder still when you're being rather an owl.

TEDDIE [*with a chuckle*]. Am I mistaken in thinking you're not very easy to please?

ELIZABETH. Oh, it's monstrous. I was all wrought up and ready to do anything, and now you've thoroughly put me out. I feel like a great big fat balloon that some one has put a long pin into. [*With a sudden look at him.*] Have you done it on purpose?

TEDDIE. Upon my soul I don't know what you're talking about.

ELIZABETH. I wonder if you're really much cleverer than I think you are.

TEDDIE [*taking her hands and making her sit down*]. Now tell me exactly what you want to say. By the way, do you want Lady Kitty and Lord Porteous to be here?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

LADY KITTY. Elizabeth asked us to stay.

TEDDIE. Oh, I don't mind, bless you. I only thought you might feel rather in the way.

LADY KITTY [*frigidly*]. A gentlewoman never feels in the way, Mr Luton.

TEDDIE. Won't you call me Teddie? Everybody does, you know.

[LADY KITTY *tries to give him a withering look, but she finds it very difficult to prevent herself from smiling.* TEDDIE *strokes* ELIZABETH'S *hands. She draws them away.*]

ELIZABETH. No, don't do that. Teddie, it wasn't true when I said I didn't love you. Of course I love you. But Arnold loves me, too. I didn't know how much.

TEDDIE. What has he been saying to you?

ELIZABETH. He's been very good to me, and so kind. I didn't know he could be so kind. He offered to let me divorce him.

TEDDIE. That's very decent of him.

ELIZABETH. But don't you see, it ties my hands. How can I accept such a sacrifice? I should never forgive myself if I profited by his generosity.

TEDDIE. If another man and I were devilish hungry and there was only one mutton chop between us, and he said, "You eat it," I wouldn't waste a lot of time arguing. I'd wolf it before he changed his mind.

ELIZABETH. Don't talk like that. It maddens me. I'm trying to do the right thing.

TEDDIE. You're not in love with Arnold; you're in love with me. It's idiotic to sacrifice your life for a slushy sentiment.

ELIZABETH. After all, I did marry him.

TEDDIE. Well, you made a mistake. A marriage without love is no marriage at all.

ELIZABETH. *I* made the mistake. Why should he suffer for it? If anyone has to suffer it's only right that I should.

TEDDIE. What sort of a life do you think it would be with him? When two people are married it's very difficult for one of them to be unhappy without making the other unhappy too.

ELIZABETH. I can't take advantage of his generosity.

TEDDIE. I daresay he'll get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

ELIZABETH. You're being beastly, Teddie. He was simply wonderful. I never knew he had it in him. He was really noble.

TEDDIE. You are talking rot, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I wonder if you'd be capable of acting like that.

TEDDIE. Acting like what?

ELIZABETH. What would you do if I were married to you and came and told you I loved somebody else and wanted to leave you?

TEDDIE. You have very pretty blue eyes, Elizabeth. I'd black first one and then the other. And after that we'd see.

ELIZABETH. You damned brute!

TEDDIE. I've often thought I wasn't quite a gentleman. Had it ever struck you?

[*They look at one another for a while.*]

ELIZABETH. You know, you are taking an unfair advantage of me. I feel as if I came to you quite unsuspectingly and when I wasn't looking you kicked me on the shins.

TEDDIE. Don't you think we'd get on rather well together?

PORTEOUS. Elizabeth's a fool if she don't stick to her husband. It's bad enough for the man, but for the woman — it's damnable. I hold no brief for Arnold. He plays bridge like a fool. Saving your presence, Kitty, I think he's a prig.

LADY KITTY. Poor dear, his father was at his age. I daresay he'll grow out of it.

PORTEOUS. But you stick to him, Elizabeth, stick to him. Man is a gregarious animal. We're members of a herd. If we break the herd's laws we suffer for it. And we suffer damnably.

LADY KITTY. Oh, Elizabeth, my dear child, don't go. It's not worth it. It's not worth it. I tell you that, and I've sacrificed everything to love.

[*A pause.*]

ELIZABETH. I'm afraid.

TEDDIE [*in a whisper*]. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I can't face it. It's asking too much of me. Let's say good-bye to one another, Teddie. It's the only thing to do. And have pity on me.

I'm giving up all my hope of happiness.

[*He goes up to her and looks into her eyes.*]

TEDDIE. But I wasn't offering you happiness. I don't think my sort of love tends to happiness. I'm jealous. I'm not a very easy man to get on with. I'm often out of temper and irritable. I should be fed to the teeth with you sometimes, and so would you be with me. I daresay we'd fight like cat and dog, and sometimes we'd hate each other. Often you'd be wretched and bored stiff and lonely, and often you'd be frightfully homesick, and then you'd regret all you'd lost. Stupid women would be rude to you because we'd run away together. And some of them would cut you. I don't offer you peace and quietness. I offer you unrest and anxiety. I don't offer you happiness. I offer you love.

ELIZABETH [*stretching out her arms*]. You hateful creature, I absolutely adore you!

[*He throws his arms round her and kisses her passionately on the lips.*]

LADY KITTY. Of course the moment he said he'd give her a black eye I knew it was finished.

PORTEOUS [*good-humoredly*]. You are a fool, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I know I am, but I can't help it.

TEDDIE. Let's make a bolt for it now.

ELIZABETH. Shall we?

TEDDIE. This minute.

PORTEOUS. You're damned fools, both of you, damned fools! If you like you can have my car.

TEDDIE. That's awfully kind of you. As a matter of fact I got it out of the garage. It's just along the drive.

PORTEOUS [*indignantly*]. How do you mean, you got it out of the garage?

TEDDIE. Well, I thought there'd be a lot of bother, and it seemed to me the best thing would be for Elizabeth and me not to stand upon the order of our going, you know. Do it now. An excellent motto for a business man.

PORTEOUS. Do you mean to say you were going to steal my car?

TEDDIE. Not exactly. I was only going to bolshevise it, so to speak.

PORTEOUS. I'm speechless. I'm absolutely speechless.

TEDDIE. Hang it all, I couldn't carry Elizabeth all the way to London. She's so damned plump.

ELIZABETH. You dirty dog!

PORTEOUS [*spluttering*]. Well, well, well! . . . [*Helplessly.*] I like him, Kitty, it's no good pretending I don't. I like him.

TEDDIE. The moon's shining, Elizabeth. We'll drive all through the night.

PORTEOUS. They'd better go to San Michele. I'll wire to have it got ready for them.

LADY KITTY. That's where we went when Hughie and I. . . . [*Faltering.*] Oh, you dear things, how I envy you!

PORTEOUS [*mopping his eyes*]. Now don't cry, Kitty. Confound you, don't cry.

TEDDIE. Come, darling.

ELIZABETH. But I can't go like this.

TEDDIE. Nonsense! Lady Kitty will lend you her cloak. Won't you?

LADY KITTY [*taking it off*]. You're capable of tearing it off my back if I don't.

TEDDIE [*putting the cloak on* ELIZABETH]. And we'll buy you a toothbrush in London in the morning.

LADY KITTY. She must write a note for Arnold. I'll put it on her pin-cushion.

TEDDIE. Pin-cushion be blowed! Come, darling. We'll drive through the dawn and through the sunrise.

ELIZABETH [*kissing* LADY KITTY *and* PORTEOUS]. Good-bye. Good-bye.

[TEDDIE *stretches out his hand and she takes it. Hand in hand they go out into the night.*]

LADY KITTY. Oh, Hughie, how it all comes back to me! Will they suffer all we suffered? And have we suffered all in vain?

PORTEOUS. My dear, I don't know that in life it matters so much what you do as what you are. No one can learn by the experience of another because no circumstances are quite the same. I we made rather a hash of things perhaps

it was because we were rather trivial people. You can do anything in this world if you're prepared to take the consequences, and consequences depend on character.

[*Enter* CHAMPION-CHENEY *rubbing his hands. He is as pleased as Punch.*]

C.-C. Well, I think I've settled the hash of that young man.

LADY KITTY. Oh!

C.-C. You have to get up very early in the morning to get the better of your humble servant.

[*There is the sound of a car starting.*]

LADY KITTY. What is that?

C.-C. It sounds like a car. I expect it's your chauffeur taking one of the maids for a joy-ride.

PORTEOUS. Whose hash are you talking about?

C.-C. Mr. Edward Luton's, my dear Hughie. I told Arnold exactly what to do and he's done it. What makes a prison? Why, bars and bolts. Remove them and a prisoner won't want to escape. Clever, I flatter myself.

PORTEOUS. You were always that, Clive, but at the moment you're obscure.

C.-C. I told Arnold to go to Elizabeth and tell her she could have her freedom. I told him to sacrifice himself all along the line. I know what women are. The moment every obstacle was removed to her marriage with Teddie Luton, half the allurement was gone.

LADY KITTY. Arnold did that?

C.-C. He followed my instructions to the letter. I've just seen him. She's shaken. I'm willing to bet five hundred pounds to a penny that she won't bolt. A downy old bird, eh? Downy's the word. Downy.

[*He begins to laugh. They laugh, too. Presently they are all three in fits of laughter.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

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The Liars (H. A. Jones)
The Awakening (Paul Hervieu)
The Concert (Hermann Bahr)

QUESTIONS ON "THE CIRCLE"

1. Explain the title.

2. Is this play a comedy of manners or a comedy of character?

3. What is the author's attitude toward conventional morality? Is he cynical?

4. Do you learn enough about Champion-Cheney to understand why Kitty was led to desert him?

5. What is the significance of Hughie's remark near the end of the play about "trivial people"?

6. Comment on the ending in general, and on the dramatic irony of the closing scene.

A. A. MILNE

Alan Alexander Milne has revealed his genius in many ways, not the least notable of which is his imitation — in a not unsuccessful manner — of the inimitable Sir James Matthew Barrie. Mr. Milne very frankly acknowledges his debt to the author of the most delightful comedies of our time, "who gave me a first chance." *The Truth About Blayds, The Romantic Age,* and *Mr. Pim Passes By* are characterized by the same whimsical charm that has endeared Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows* and *Quality Street* to thousands of drama lovers. Milne is more than imitator, however, just as Keats was more than a disciple of Spenser, and Rossetti more than an imitator of Keats: he is an individual artist, and his plays reflect the charm of his own personality. Milne is also a novelist, essayist, poet and the most successful writer of children's books since Lewis Carroll and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Milne was born in London in 1882 and attended Westminster School and Cambridge University. In his school and university he was a notable cricket and foot ball player and a generous contributor to the student periodicals. During his seven years at Westminster he contributed numerous poems and parodies, and at Cambridge he edited the *Granta,* the University literary magazine. Saving enough from his college allowance to support him one year after leaving college, he devoted himself to free-lance writing, earning, he tells us, £20 the first year and £220 the second. From 1906 to 1914 he was assistant editor of *Punch,* his weekly column initialed "A. A. M." becoming familiar to the many readers of the famous humorous magazine. At the outbreak of the war he enlisted with the Royal Warwickshire regiment and saw active service in France until 1917, when he was invalided home. While Milne was yet in uniform he began writing plays, with the result that by the termination of the war he had already won a name as a dramatist and was a leader in the movement to restore intelligent drama to the theatre, which during the war years had succumbed almost altogether to *extravaganza* and musical comedy.

His first five plays, written while he was still in the army, are all inferior to *Mr. Pim Passes By* (1919) and *The Dover Road* (1922), his best received comedies. As is to be expected, the war ripened his humor and is responsible for an occasional graver and more realistic note. *Success* (1923) is a more serious play. Here are both realism and fancy, and a delicate humor that imperceptibly shades into irony. The romantic interlude of the dream with its searching insight into the child mind (no one who has seen the play performed can ever forget the haunting war-song, the "pom-perom-perompity-pom," and "Half a pound of tuppenny rice") is skilfully woven into the web of the story. Underneath it all is the careful study of Selby Mannock, a perfect example of Browning's "failure in success." Hardened through the years by starched propriety, by a worship of success and expediency, by the deliberate suppression of his humanity and sentiment, he strays far from the generous promise of his boyhood and youth; so far in fact, that he is irretrievably a victim of the gods he chose to follow, and the play ends with his final surrender to their dictates.

There are critics who find too much saccharinity in Milne's plays; others accuse him of avoiding the realities of life; still others note a willingness to sacrifice truth for effect — a greater concern for sweetness than for light. In *Success* there is no sacrificing of truth in the unfolding of Selby Mannock's mind and soul. Here environment as well as character is fate, and Brannock's effort to escape is pathetic in its inevitable futility. The spectacle of the two children entering into a life that will parallel their father's adds a cynical touch to the play, although there is a slight hope that Arthur may yet save his soul. When the final curtain falls, however, we are rather certain that the strangle-hold of success will claim the son as it has claimed the father.

SUCCESS
(1923)

BY

A. A. MILNE

CHARACTERS

The Rt. Hon. R. Selby Mannock, M. P.
Lady Jane Mannock
Arthur Mannock
Freda Mannock
Digby
Edward Eversley
Bertie Capp
John Reader
Lord Carchester
Nite
Squier
Buteus Maiden
Sally

Act I: Cavendish Square. Evening.

Act II: Enderways, Yorkshire.
Scene I: Dick's Room. Midnight . . . and after.
Scene II: A corner of the Wilderness. Early morning.

Act III: Cavendish Square.
Scene I: Afternoon.
Scene II: Afternoon, two days later.

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SUCCESS

ACT I

SCENE.—*Cavendish Square. Evening. The* MANNOCK *family has finished with the grosser forms of eating, and is now dealing politely with the nuts and wine. It does this in what is called the library (though* MANNOCK *is not much of a reader), leaving the débris of the dinner, and the airs which cling to it, to the dining-room. The four of them, very clean, very proper, very safe, sit round the polished mahogany, cracking, munching, talking.* SELBY MANNOCK, *that rising young Cabinet Minister in the late forties, is intent on a particularly tiresome nut which won't declare itself. He deals with it methodically, his grave, handsome face showing no sign of anxiety. Probably he was human once, but now the official manner has descended on him. He can say things like "Ladies and Gentlemen, we have nailed our colors to the mast," or, "Our glorious Empire on which the sun never sets," without feeling uncomfortable. He is obviously an important man; not pompously so, but with the quiet assurance which only middle-aged politicians can bring to the pretence that any of us matters more to Heaven than another. There was a time when he had a conscience, but it gave up the struggle some years ago, and is now as departmental as his manner.* LADY JANE, *his wife, has the manner too. She was born in high politics, whereas* MANNOCK *has only acquired them. She still has the prettiness, though it is colder now, which, with her position and money, carried him off his feet twenty-five years ago, and replaced him a dozen rungs of the ladder ahead of his contemporaries. Her world is divided into people who matter at the moment, and people who don't; to the former she can be very pleasant indeed; to the latter also, if there is a chance of their mattering later on. On the other side of her is their only son* ARTHUR, *just down from the Varsity. At the moment he is rebellious, hating the manner as much as a Vicar's son hates the Litany. But it is doubtful if he has the moral backbone to fight against it for long. Success will have him for her own; let him make the most of his freedom meanwhile by denouncing the dishonesty of politics and the servitude of a career. At any rate he will amuse* FREDA, *his younger sister. She also will be successful — probably at St. Margaret's, possibly in the Abbey — but her sense of humor will do something to save her. Their leisurely, well-fed talk, has been going on intermittently since the wine went round. . . .*

ARTHUR [*suddenly, after a drink*]. Well, all I can say is that, if that's the case, you ought to resign!

[*He waits with an air, as if for the reporters to write "Sensation."*]

LADY JANE [*after a pause*]. Nutcrackers, Arthur.

FREDA. Father's got them. [*Taking them from him.*] Here you are.

LADY JANE. Thank you.

ARTHUR [*trying again*]. It's the only honest thing to do!

LADY JANE [*languidly*]. You're very young, dear. [*Crack!*]

ARTHUR. I suppose I ought to be

crushed by that, Mother, but I'm afraid I'm not. I might just as well say that Father's very middle-aged. That isn't the point.

FREDA. What *is* the point? I seem to have missed it. After you with the crackers, Mother.

ARTHUR. Honesty, even in politics, isn't a question of age. At least it oughtn't to be.

FREDA [*to* LADY JANE]. Thanks. . . . It's a question of what you call honesty.

ARTHUR. Exactly! You have two standards; one for private life and one for public life. That's what I protest against.

FREDA. Exit protesting.

LADY JANE. My dear boy, what do you expect? It always has been so, and always will be.

ARTHUR [*aggressively*]. Why?

LADY JANE. Don't ask *me*. Why does the sun go round the earth?—

FREDA. It doesn't.

LADY JANE [*taken aback, but recovering gallantly*]. Well then, why doesn't it? Why— [*with a wave of her hand*] Why anything? *I* don't know. You've got to take the world as you find it. When you're young, you think that you're going to make a wonderful new world of it, all by yourself. As you grow up, you realize that you can't, and that, as you haven't very long to be in it, you'll be happier if you make the best you can of the old world.

ARTHUR [*with an air*]. Again I protest.

FREDA. Protesting's never any good. You want to break something.

[*And now, at last,* SELBY MANNOCK *has finished his nut.*]

MANNOCK [*wiping his mouth*]. There! . . . What were you saying, Arthur? [*This is too much for* ARTHUR, *who, after one indignant look, drops into sulky silence.* FREDA *laughs.*] Ring the bell, will you, there's a good boy.

LADY JANE. What is it?

[ARTHUR *slouches out of his chair and rings the bell.*]

MANNOCK. Thanks, old fellow. . . . Why don't I send in my resignation from the Cabinet? Because my resignation would certainly be accepted.

LADY JANE [*to her son*]. It's ridiculous, dear, to expect your Father to throw up his whole career just for nothing at all. What good would it do?

FREDA [*with interest*]. *Would* the P.M. accept it, Father?

MANNOCK. I think undoubtedly.

FREDA. I thought that that was where Marjory came in. The Duke wouldn't allow it, would he?

MANNOCK. He mightn't like it, but— In any case that isn't the point now. Arthur wants, not a mock resignation, but a real one. Why?

ARTHUR [*mumbling*]. The Redistribution Bill.

MANNOCK. Well?

ARTHUR. You said that you thought it monstrous.

MANNOCK. Monstrous was *your* word.

LADY JANE. Your Father only said that he didn't like the Bill.

MANNOCK. And if you had given me time, Arthur, I should have added that I didn't like it because it didn't go far enough.

ARTHUR. Good Lord!

FREDA. It goes pretty far. It will dish Labor jolly well at the next election.

MANNOCK. Well, what am I in politics for at all, if not to do that?

ARTHUR [*rudely*]. You can fight fair, I suppose?

MANNOCK [*calmly*]. My dear Arthur, how on earth is any one to say what distribution of seats is fair and what isn't?

ARTHUR. You admit that the Government wants redistribution just so as to improve its own electoral chances?

FREDA [*to her Mother*]. Its own electoral chances— Arthur is getting quite the manner, isn't he?

[*But* LADY JANE *does not smile. She has been brought up on the manner.*]

MANNOCK. Certainly I admit it.

ARTHUR [*with a shrug*]. Well!

MANNOCK. And I suppose *you* admit that Labor is opposing it just because it spoils *its* own electoral chances?

ARTHUR. Er — naturally —

MANNOCK [*with* ARTHUR'S *shrug*]. Well!

FREDA. Each for himself, and himself for — for himself. Our motto.

ARTHUR [*contemptuously*]. Exactly.

MANNOCK. And rightly.

LADY JANE [*with conviction*]. Certainly.

MANNOCK. *We* paint England Blue, and Labor comes and paints it Red, and the result is the Purple which suits her. But only if we have the courage to put our whole hearts into the True Blue. If we begin weakly dabbing on a sort of purply blue, what's the result? Not purple at all, but a dirty red. And nobody wants that.

LADY JANE [*interested*]. Have you ever used that in the House, Richard? It's rather good.

MANNOCK [*doubtfully*]. I don't think so. [*Trying to remember.*] No, I don't think so. It would be better on the platform, I think. It isn't altogether sound.

LADY JANE. Sound enough.

MANNOCK. For the platform, yes. . . . Oh, Digby!

[DIGBY *the butler is there.*]

DIGBY. Yes, sir?

MANNOCK. Mr. Edward Eversley is coming in this evening. Show him in here.

DIGBY. Yes, sir?

MANNOCK. He'll probably have coffee.

DIGBY. Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

MANNOCK [*to his wife*]. I'm sorry, dear, I meant to have told you.

LADY JANE [*trying to place him*]. Eversley. . . . Eversley.

MANNOCK. No, you don't know him. At least, you've met him, I suppose. He was at our wedding.

LADY JANE. Oh!

[*One gathers that many strange friends of her husband's youth were there.*]

MANNOCK. No, I'm not sure that he was.

LADY JANE. What does he do?

[*Not that it matters.*]

MANNOCK. He's become a great authority on gardens, I believe. Writes in the papers about them.

LADY JANE [*brightening*]. Oh! We might ask him down to Drayton. He could help us with the terraces. Mr. Ferris so conventional — and so expensive. Not next week — the week after. No, that won't do, because —

FREDA. Have you suddenly found him again, Father, or has he always been about?

MANNOCK. I met him to-day at the Club. He was lunching with somebody. I hadn't seen him for twenty years. . . . More. . . . [*He is thoughtful.*]

FREDA. Twenty years! Almost good enough for a dinner, I should have thought.

MANNOCK. He was only up from the country for a night. He hadn't got any clothes with him.

LADY JANE. I suppose he has some at home?

MANNOCK. I imagine so.

LADY JANE. Then we'd better make it the 23rd. That's the Saturday.

ARTHUR [*aggressively*]. Why shouldn't he dine in a tweed suit? And anyway, what's the difference between dining in a tweed suit and coming in after dinner in a tweed suit?

FREDA. About two hours, Arthur.

MANNOCK [*thoughtfully*]. I hardly knew him at first. He's gone very grey.

FREDA. Was he your fag at school, or were you his? It's always one or the other.

MANNOCK. Neither. We were contemporaries. And we lived in the same village. He might be a year older. I forget now.

LADY JANE. Well, we'll leave you to talk about the old days together. Is there a Mrs. Eversley?

MANNOCK. Yes. In the country. There was a son, I believe. But that was twenty years ago. I don't know what's happened to him; we didn't get as far as that.

LADY JANE. I suppose she'd have to be asked. [*Hopefully.*] Perhaps she's an invalid.

[*Digby opens the door and announces* Edward Eversley. *He is the same age as* Mannock, *but looks older and greyer. A pleasant, kindly man, but with the absurd air of being a dear old gentleman. As boys together, Mannock was his hero, and even now there is something of that simple boyish admiration and love left in his eyes.*]

Digby. Mr. Eversley!

[*He goes out.*]

Mannock [*getting up*]. Good! You're just in time for a glass of port. Let me see, you have met my wife, haven't you?

Eversley [*shaking hands*]. How do you do?

Lady Jane [*graciously*]. How do you do?

Eversley. You will forgive my clothes, won't you? Dick explained to you how it was—

Lady Jane [*wondering who* Dick *is*]. Dick? . . . Oh, my husband, yes! Of course!

[*She smiles pleasantly at him. After all, he is going to do the gardens at Drayton for nothing, and he may even be a constituent.*]

Mannock. My younger daughter, Freda. My son, Arthur. [*They bow and murmur to each other.*] Freda, you must make room for Mr. Eversley.

Freda [*making room*]. Come on, Mr. Eversley. We're longing to hear how you and Father robbed the apple orchard together, and were chased by the farmer, and thrashed by the headmaster, and all that sort of thing.

[Digby *and a parlormaid have come in with coffee, and glasses for the visitor. The coffee is put in front of* Lady Jane. Digby *walks round the table with the port and fills* Eversley's *glass.*]

Lady Jane. Don't be ridiculous, Freda.

Eversley [*sadly*]. Alas, there are no such stories. We were model boys. Your father made a false quantity once—let me see, that would be in '88—but otherwise we gave no trouble at all.

[*With a smile.*] Eh, Dick?

[*He drinks his port.*]

Mannock [*without enthusiasm for the subject*]. We were pretty ordinary boys, I expect. Cigars, Arthur.

Lady Jane [*handing him a cup*]. For Freda. You'll have coffee?

Eversley. No, thank you.

Arthur. Cigar or cigarette?

Eversley. Neither, thank you.

Arthur. Father?

Mannock [*taking one*]. Thank you.

Freda. Thank you, Arthur.

Arthur. Sorry.

[*He holds out the box to her and takes one himself, and then goes back to his place.*]

Lady Jane. I hear you're a great authority on gardens.

Eversley. I have a great love for gardens.

Lady Jane. Oh! . . . But you do write about them?

Eversley. Oh yes, yes.

Lady Jane. How delightful Richard, Mr. Eversley must come down to Drayton—[*to* Eversley] our house in Sussex—and see the gardens there. It would be nice, wouldn't it? [*To* Eversley.] We've been making some alterations lately. We should value your opinion—and help.

Eversley. That's very kind of you.

Lady Jane [*with a gesture of "Not at all"*]. We must fix up a week-end. Mrs. Eversley too, if she would come. [*She waits hopefully for an announcement that the lady is bedridden, but* Eversley *only bows.*] That will be nice.

Freda. You'll like Drayton, it's terribly beautiful.

Eversley. I'm sure I shall.

Lady Jane. You write a great deal, I expect?

Eversley. Well, yes, about things which interest me.

Lady Jane. And know all the editors. . . . Arthur wants to write. It's difficult at first, unless you know the people. A word in the right ear—

Eversley. Ah, but which is the right ear?

Lady Jane. Oh well, of course!

Eversley. I think I should want to

whisper a word in the ear of Mr. Arthur. "Trust to yourself. Never mind about introductions. They can't help you."

MANNOCK [*with authority, cigar in mouth*]. Naturally, you have to have it in you. Dickens would always be Dickens, that's true enough. But human nature being what it is. . . . Pass the port, Arthur.

EVERSLEY. No more, thank you.

MANNOCK. And what of your own boy, Eversley? You have a son, haven't you?

EVERSLEY [*gently*]. Yes, I have a son. I suppose I should say "I had a son." [*They all look elaborately unconcerned.*] He was killed in the war.

LADY JANE [*shocked*]. Oh!

MANNOCK. My dear fellow, I beg your pardon.

EVERSLEY [*going on quietly*]. But you know, we still say to ourselves, "We have a son." We still have — what made him our son — our love and our pride in him — and we have the sure knowledge that we shall see him again.

[*They look at each other and away from each other uncomfortably. Really, the man is being almost irreligious.*]

MANNOCK [*hastily*]. Of course, of course!

FREDA. Was he in the Flying Corps?

EVERSLEY. At the end, yes. But he was in the infantry long enough for me to salute him.

[*They all look at him in amazement.*]

LADY JANE. To — to salute him?

EVERSLEY [*smiling*]. Yes. You remember all those comic pictures at the time — the manager saluting his clerk — the father saluting his son. Well, we really did it. I was in his battalion, actually in his company, as a private when he was a second lieutenant.

[*He beams at them proudly.*]

LADY JANE [*with a glance from him to her husband and back again*]. But — but however old were you?

EVERSLEY. Oh, not too old in those days. I've aged since. And, you see, my boy was just a little under the limit. So he borrowed two years from me, and that made us both quite happy.

[*Now you can almost see* LADY JANE *looking from that dead boy to her own son, and back again.*]

FREDA. Were you in France together?

EVERSLEY. In different parts of the line. But we managed to meet once or twice.

ARTHUR. *You* were in France?

EVERSLEY. Yes! Why not?

ARTHUR. Really in France? At the front? In the trenches?

EVERSLEY. Of course.

ARTHUR. And your boy. How old was he when war broke out?

MANNOCK [*knowing what is coming*]. Arthur! [*To* LADY JANE.] My dear!

ARTHUR. How old —

LADY JANE [*getting up*]. How extraordinarily interesting, Mr. Eversley. But you and Richard must have a great deal to talk about with each other. [*They are all up now.*] Freda! Arthur! You must bring Mr. Eversley upstairs before he goes, Richard.

MANNOCK. Of course.

[*He is opening the door for her.*]

LADY JANE. Thank you. . . . Arthur! [*Reluctantly Arthur follows the ladies out.*]

[*As soon as they are alone,* EVERSLEY *turns to his friend.*]

EVERSLEY. I say, may I smoke a pipe?

MANNOCK [*absently*]. Of course!

EVERSLEY. Good! [*He fills it.*]

MANNOCK [*still absently*]. We've taken to coming in here at the nuts and wine stage — an old custom of my wife's people.

EVERSLEY. They used to do it at Cambridge — the Dons. Oxford too, I suppose.

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . It's my room really. . . . [*Getting to the point.*] What you were saying — about the Army — of course you were younger than I was —

EVERSLEY. One day — don't you remember? [MANNOCK *looks inquiringly at him.*] Our birthdays. Mine was the day after yours.

MANNOCK. Oh, was that all? I knew you were younger. . . . You were lucky

to be your own master — free to join up. I — I was — it was impossible.

EVERSLEY. My dear Dick, of course! You were an important member of the Government, running the war for us. I was just at your orders.

MANNOCK. It was my one regret that my — my responsibilities prevented me from shouldering a rifle with — with my friends.

EVERSLEY [*reflectively*]. It's funny how people always talked about "shouldering" a rifle. You only shoulder arms in a Rifle Regiment. *We* sloped 'em. [*With a laugh.*] There! That's about all of my soldiering that I remember now. Funny how it slips away.

MANNOCK [*still justifying himself*]. Arthur was very anxious to run away from school. Naturally. So was every boy. He wasn't actually eighteen until the last summer. . . . The war was finishing then, and I . . . it seemed a pity, his last term . . . I arranged —

EVERSLEY [*helping him out*]. Tell me about your children, Dick. Have I seen them all?

MANNOCK. There's my elder girl. Marjory.

EVERSLEY. Ah, what about her?

MANNOCK. She married young Robert Harlow.

EVERSLEY [*no wiser*]. Oh!

MANNOCK. The Duke's second son, you know.

EVERSLEY. Oh! . . . I am afraid I am very ignorant. Is there only one Duke?

MANNOCK. In politics, at present, yes. Only one that matters.

EVERSLEY. Oh!

MANNOCK. It all helps.

EVERSLEY. Oh! [*With a smile.*] But it's no good your trying to pretend that she married him just so as to help your political career, Dick.

MANNOCK. Not "just so" of course. She's keen on politics, too. Young Harlow is in the House. It helps him to have married my daughter; it helps me that she married *him*.

EVERSLEY. Oh! [*After a pause.*] Whom is Miss Freda marrying?

MANNOCK. She's only a child. There's nothing settled.

EVERSLEY. Is she keen on politics too?

MANNOCK. Naturally.

EVERSLEY. And the boy? He wants to write?

MANNOCK. Every young man of intelligence wants to write. He'll get over it.

EVERSLEY. Is he destined for politics too?

MANNOCK. Naturally the choice is his. But I imagine that that's what he will settle down to directly. He has great opportunities.

EVERSLEY. He has indeed. . . .

MANNOCK [*after a pause*]. You only had the one boy?

EVERSLEY. Yes.

MANNOCK. A pity.

EVERSLEY. You believe in the large family, Dick?

MANNOCK [*cigar in mouth*]. Three or possibly four, yes. Childless marriages in a country like ours — with our Empire, our responsibilities — well, where should we be in another hundred years?

EVERSLEY [*quietly*]. We were very poor when we were first married. When my boy was born, we lived in two rooms. Mary was in one; I was in the other. The walls are thin in those houses. I realized then that it was she who was saving the Empire, not I. It was not for me to say how many children we should have.

MANNOCK [*blowing out smoke*]. Oh, come! A man can't escape his responsibilities like that.

EVERSLEY. Where were you, Dick, when your first child was born?

MANNOCK. Well, really! I don't know that — Let me see, what year would that be?

EVERSLEY [*to himself*]. Ah, then you weren't in the other room.

MANNOCK. No, I was down in Liverpool; of course! My by-election was on. Yes, I remember now. I got a telegram the evening before polling-day. It was just in time. I used to tell Arthur that he won the seat for me. A little human touch like that helps enormously at election time.

EVERSLEY. I see. . . . But of course

one can never be quite certain when an election is coming on.

MANNOCK [*taking it literally*]. No.

EVERSLEY [*keeping the joke to himself*]. Well, well, you haven't much to complain of, Dick. A Cabinet Minister! Prime Minister one day, perhaps.

MANNOCK [*with a shrug*]. It's just possible, I suppose.

EVERSLEY. Who would have guessed it in the old days?

MANNOCK. I've been lucky, of course. And my wife has helped me enormously.

EVERSLEY. I am sure she has.

MANNOCK. I couldn't have done it without her. It is difficult for an outsider, as I was in the early days. Of course it *has* been done, but only by very exceptional people, and I never claimed to be that. She knew everybody; introduced me to the right people; kept me in front of them. I suppose you would say that I played my cards well, but she dealt me the hand.

EVERSLEY [*to himself*]. Yes, yes, I think I understand.

MANNOCK [*with a laugh at the absurdity of it*]. In the old days, when we were boys, I used to think it was you who were going to do the big things.

EVERSLEY. No, no. It was always you. Don't you remember? It was always you who were Nite, and I was your Squier. Don't you remember?

MANNOCK [*remembering*]. Yes, Nite, Squier and — Yes.

EVERSLEY. And Buteus Maiden.

MANNOCK [*he has never quite forgotten*]. And Buteus Maiden.

[*They are silent for a while.*]

EVERSLEY [*humming to himself*]. *How* did it go?

MANNOCK. The War Song of the — what was it? —

EVERSLEY. The Dreadnought Knight.

MANNOCK. Dreadnought?

EVERSLEY. Don't you remember? She said you were her Red Cross Knight, and I said you weren't a Cross, you were only a Nought — you were a Red Nought Knight.

MANNOCK. That's right. And *I* said —

EVERSLEY. No, *she* said —

MANNOCK. Yes. *She* said I was her Dreadnought Knight.

[*He is a little ashamed of all this, but for the first time you see something of that eager boy who died twenty-five years ago.*]

EVERSLEY [*humming again*]. How did it go?

MANNOCK [*awkwardly; yet in some unaccountable way, happy even to be singing it again*].

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle,
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weasel.

EVERSLEY [*eagerly*]. That's it.

MANNOCK. Do you remember how I said —

EVERSLEY. No, *I* said —

MANNOCK [*after thinking*]. That's right. *You* said that you didn't like rice —

EVERSLEY. And I was going to say "Half a pound of ham and eggs" —

MANNOCK. And *I* said that the Squier *always* had to sing the same song as the Nite —

EVERSLEY. And I said anyhow I would jolly well *think* ham and eggs —

MANNOCK [*very eagerly*]. And *she* said — [*He breaks off suddenly, and there is a little silence.*]

EVERSLEY [*gently*]. Dick, have you — do you ever — have you ever seen Sally — well, I mean, since we —

MANNOCK [*in a low voice*]. No. Not since —

EVERSLEY. That last summer?

MANNOCK [*shaking his head*]. No. I went to London —

EVERSLEY. We both went to London.

MANNOCK. I had just been called.

EVERSLEY. I had just got a job in the City.

MANNOCK. Didn't *you* ever go down to Enderways again?

EVERSLEY. No.

MANNOCK. Why not?

EVERSLEY. I was afraid to.

MANNOCK. How do you mean?

EVERSLEY [*awkwardly*]. I thought I — I thought you — Of course, a little

later, when I met Mary, I knew that I never had been really in love with Sally, but I thought I was then, and I thought you — it seemed to be understood. [*To himself.*] You were her Dreadnought Knight.

MANNOCK [*with a self-conscious laugh*]. Just a boy and girl romance. I — it was impossible. She — we had no money. How could we? Better to make a clean sweep of it all, and begin again.

EVERSLEY [*to himself*]. So you began again. . . . And gradually success closed in on you.

MANNOCK [*looking at him sharply*]. What an extraordinary remark!

EVERSLEY [*surprised*]. What?

MANNOCK. Success "closed in" on you.

EVERSLEY. Did I say that? [*With an embarrassed little laugh.*] I beg your pardon. I had no idea. No idea even that I was thinking it. Ridiculous! [*After a pause.*] She's married now, you know.

MANNOCK [*wishing to be done with the subject*]. I'm glad.

EVERSLEY. But not very happily.

MANNOCK. Ah, I'm sorry about that. The Old Man's dead long ago, of course?

EVERSLEY. Of course.

MANNOCK [*with a laugh*]. The Old Man. [*Tapping his head.*] Never quite all there, was he?

EVERSLEY. I don't think that we used to say that when we were boys, Dick. Sally didn't.

MANNOCK. Of course! Her own father!

EVERSLEY. Unworldly. . . . Perhaps that's the same nowadays as not being quite all there.

MANNOCK. The two of them alone together all those years in that rambling old house!

EVERSLEY [*with a chuckle*]. Hardly alone. We practically lived there in the holidays.

MANNOCK. What happened to the place?

EVERSLEY. She lives there still. That was all he left her, you know. I think she married to save it.

MANNOCK. It all seems very long ago.

[*They sit there silently thinking of the long ago. . . .* FREDA *comes in, followed by* BERTIE CAPP, *a stout young man, who tries to hide his extreme cleverness beneath the make-up of a fool.*]

FREDA. Here's Bertie, Father.

MANNOCK [*coming out of the past*]. Hullo, Bertie. How are you?

BERTIE [*dropping his eye-glass*]. Pretty well, thanks.

FREDA. Don't go too close to him, he's covered with eucalyptus.

BERTIE. A precautionary measure only. The cold belongs to somebody else. My private microbes —

MANNOCK [*to* EVERSLEY]. Do you know Bertie Capp? . . . This is Mr. Eversley.

BERTIE. How are *you*, sir?

EVERSLEY. How do you do?

BERTIE. My private microbes, who distribute gout and insomnia, are resting for the moment. It's a hard life.

MANNOCK. How's the Prime Minister?

BERTIE [*waving his handkerchief*]. Like that.

FREDA [*with a face*]. Oh, put it away, Bertie. I'd rather have the cold.

BERTIE. I give him two more days in bed. Between ourselves he likes it there.

FREDA [*to* EVERSLEY]. Bertie is the P.M.'s P.P.S.

EVERSLEY [*with a smile*]. Thank you very much.

FREDA. The Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary. In other words, Bertie runs England.

BERTIE. I consult Miss Freda on all the important points.

MANNOCK [*to* BERTIE]. Did you want to see me?

BERTIE. Well — er —

FREDA. Come on, Mr. Eversley. We'll go upstairs.

EVERSLEY [*to* MANNOCK]. Perhaps I'd better say good-bye, Dick.

MANNOCK [*carelessly*]. Good-bye. I'll be seeing you again before very long. Talk to my wife about that week-end.

EVERSLEY. Thank you, thank you. [*To* BERTIE.] Good-night.

BERTIE. Good-night. [*He opens the*

door.] I hope I haven't given you the Prime Minister's cold.

EVERSLEY [*smiling*]. It would be an honor to have it.

BERTIE. Oh well, he's nearly finished with it. Good-night. Good-night, Freda, if I don't see you again.

FREDA. Good-night. [*They go out.*]

BERTIE [*closing the door*]. Is that the Garden Eversley?

MANNOCK [*surprised*]. Yes. Do you know him?

BERTIE. I know his book, of course.

MANNOCK. Oh! [*With a faint touch of pride.*] We were boys together.

BERTIE. He's a good bit older than you, isn't he?

MANNOCK [*hastily*]. There was not much in it. Well?

BERTIE [*taking a large envelope from his pocket*]. The Prime Minister's compliments, and would you rather have a Baronetcy or an absolute snip for the 2.30?

MANNOCK [*not surprised*]. Ah! It's all right, then?

BERTIE. Very much all right. Between ourselves, it's a damn good speech. I read it to him. He just lay there, without a movement. Absorbed.

MANNOCK. Asleep, probably.

BERTIE [*candidly*]. Well, so *I* thought at first. But I drank his medicine once by mistake — being a thirsty sort of speech, I had put a glass of water handy — and the subsequent noise woke him. I mean it was obvious he was awake all the time.

MANNOCK [*unamused*]. Any comments?

BERTIE. Well, yes.

MANNOCK. What?

BERTIE. "Clever fellow, Mannock. Er — "

MANNOCK. Go on.

BERTIE. "Clever fellow, Mannock. He brings to the obvious such a wealth of reticence that it almost sounds improper." Said between coughs and grunts, you know, it sounded rather good. But I daresay there isn't much in it.

MANNOCK. You have to be obvious on the platform.

BERTIE. Oh, quite. . . . I say, do you see *The Sunday Socialist?*

MANNOCK [*curtly*]. Never.

BERTIE [*taking it from his pocket*]. You haven't seen this week's?

MANNOCK. Why should I?

BERTIE. We take it in, of course. "My attention has been drawn . . ." and all that sort of thing. [*Pointing to the place.*] There! [*As* MANNOCK *reads.*] I thought I'd better bring it along.

MANNOCK [*reading*]. Yes. . . . Yes.

BERTIE. Once doesn't matter — you can deny anything once — but if he's going to make a habit of it —

MANNOCK [*firmly*]. He is not.

[*He goes on reading.*]

BERTIE. Well, I'll be getting along.

MANNOCK. Thanks very much for letting me see this. Are you going upstairs?

BERTIE. Just for a moment.

MANNOCK. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling Arthur that I should like to see him.

BERTIE. Right. [*Going to the door.*] By the way, where are you sleeping tomorrow night? Hotel?

MANNOCK [*still reading the paper*]. Carchester's putting me up. He's got some sort of place in the neighborhood, I believe.

BERTIE. Ah! I didn't know that you — [*He hesitates.*]

MANNOCK. We don't.

BERTIE [*tolerantly*]. Oh, well, it takes all sorts to make a party.

MANNOCK. Exactly. This is politics. He's popular down there, they say. He's taking the chair at the evening meeting.

BERTIE. Oh, quite. Well, good-night and good luck.

MANNOCK. Good-night.

[*He settles down to this damnable article again.* ARTHUR *comes in.*]

ARTHUR. Bertie said you wanted me.

MANNOCK [*getting up*]. Yes; sit down, won't you? [ARTHUR *sits down.*] Did you write this?

[*He gives him the paper.*]

ARTHUR [*bracing himself for the row that's coming*]. Yes.

MANNOCK. Ah! Proud of it?

ARTHUR. Not ashamed of it anyway.

MANNOCK. Then you ought to be.

ARTHUR. I don't see why.

MANNOCK. An inflammatory article in a revolutionary rag—

ARTHUR. Papers aren't rags just because you don't agree with their opinions.

MANNOCK. An impertinent article in a revolutionary rag, charging members of the Government, amongst them your own Father, with every sort of crime and folly.

ARTHUR [*calmly*]. It just means that I take the opposite side to you, that's all.

MANNOCK [*reading*]. "There is more here than political dishonor. There is personal dishonor."

ARTHUR [*uncomfortably*]. Well—I mean—

MANNOCK. Thank you, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Well, it isn't *my* fault you're a Cabinet Minister. I happen to be a Socialist—

MANNOCK. A Socialist!

ARTHUR. Why not?

MANNOCK [*contemptuously*]. Why not! Have another cigar! Have another glass of port? A Socialist! Look at yourself in the glass!

ARTHUR. Well, you can't have it both ways. If I'm a poor, uneducated devil, you say contemptuously, "Of course you're a Socialist; you want my money," and if I happen to be well-off and educated, you say contemptuously, "You a Socialist! Look at yourself in the glass!" You can't have it both ways.

MANNOCK. I beg your pardon. In fact, I'm not sure that I ought to be discussing this with you at all. This article [*tapping the paper*] is signed "Arthur *Selby* Mannock." I don't think I know him. Who is he?

ARTHUR. That's not my fault. I suppose—

MANNOCK. Your name, I think, is Arthur James Mannock? Why do you give a false name?

ARTHUR. I signed it "Arthur Mannock." Of course it had this address on it. I suppose—

MANNOCK. You suppose that the editor, wishing everybody to know that a Cabinet Minister was being accused of personal dishonor by his own son, altered it to Selby Mannock so that there should be no chance of misapprehension.

ARTHUR. I suppose he thought it was a double-barrelled name. All the papers call you Selby Mannock as if it were.

MANNOCK [*quietly*]. You know quite well why he did it. [ARTHUR *is silent.*] How many more of these articles are you writing—from my house?

ARTHUR. Well—well, as a matter of fact, they've offered me a job, sort of assistant editor—two fifty—I could get rooms somewhere—I mean, naturally I want to. I mean—

MANNOCK [*with a sneer*]. Assistant editor! . . . As assistant editor it would be your job to see that the "Selby" didn't go into your articles—

ARTHUR. Naturally—

MANNOCK. Or did go in, according as the editor wished.

ARTHUR. Well, of course I should—

[*His voice trails away.*]

[*They are silent.* MANNOCK, *realizing that he is not getting much further, decides on a new line of attack.*]

MANNOCK [*with a friendly smile*]. Look here, Arthur, let's talk this over reasonably.

ARTHUR. I shall be only too glad to.

MANNOCK [*charmingly*]. Well, then, first, thank you for having kept your temper so well. I'm afraid I've been rather provocative.

ARTHUR. Oh, I say, not at all.

MANNOCK. I do say it. And that's the trouble, Arthur. You've got such a lot of fine qualities. Brains—more brains than I have, I fancy—

ARTHUR. Oh, rot!

MANNOCK. Enthusiasm, good temper, courage— Well, I mean, how many young men would have dared to do that? [*He waves at the paper.*]

ARTHUR. Oh, I don't know.

MANNOCK. As the Prime Minister said to me the other day, "That boy of yours will go far." I know it. But in which direction? . . . It's a funny thing,

Arthur, how so many great political geniuses, writers too, have started in the wrong direction. Disraeli began as a Radical, Gladstone as a Tory— It almost seems as if one false start were necessary before you can get going. The trouble is that your enemies remember that false start, and bring it up against you. Happy the man who has no past, as somebody said. Well, that's what I'm anxious about. You're preparing a past for yourself *now*. I wonder if— You don't mind my talking like this?

ARTHUR [*interested and flattered*]. Of course not.

MANNOCK. You're a Socialist. Right. I don't agree with your opinions, but that has nothing to do with it. Now what I'm wondering is— Need you be a *public* Socialist for—well, say for a year?

ARTHUR. How do you mean? [*With a laugh.*] I shan't change in a year, if that's what you're hoping.

MANNOCK [*laughing too*]. I'm afraid you won't. [*With an air of great seriousness.*] But frankly, Arthur, old boy, I'm in a difficulty. I've been wanting to make a suggestion to you for some weeks now, only—I've been afraid.

ARTHUR. Afraid?

MANNOCK. Yes, afraid of your refusing it. I've preferred to go on hoping, rather than to close the door on my hopes by speaking to you.

ARTHUR [*after waiting for him*]. Well?

MANNOCK. My secretary is leaving me. It puts me in rather an awkward position.

ARTHUR. Which of the many?

MANNOCK. Well, naturally I don't mean at the Ministry. Reader.

[*He jerks his head at the door behind him.*]

ARTHUR. Reader? Why?

MANNOCK. He's got a better job in prospect. He's been with me a long time, but he's leaving me at last. I shall be rather lost without him. Arthur, old boy, I wish you'd take his place.

ARTHUR [*staggered*]. But—

MANNOCK. Three hundred a year I'll give you. Three fifty if you want to live out, but I'd rather you didn't.

ARTHUR. But I'm—my political opinions—

MANNOCK. I know, I know. That's why I was afraid to ask you. But couldn't you manage to keep an open mind for a year? I want you to see something of the inside of politics. If at the end of a year, you're more of a Socialist than ever, well, what a chance for you! You'll be able to expose us properly! You'll know all about us! But if I'm lucky enough to win your confidence, why perhaps one day the proudest moment of my life will come. Do you know what that will be?

ARTHUR. What?

MANNOCK. The moment when I introduce you to the Speaker in the House of Commons. Arthur Mannock, M.P. for— We can find you a dozen seats.

[*They sit there,* ARTHUR *thinking,* MANNOCK *watching him anxiously.*]

ARTHUR [*after a pause*]. It's really awfully decent of you, Father.

MANNOCK. You see, I want you rather badly.

ARTHUR. You're sure it doesn't commit me to anything?

MANNOCK [*quickly*]. Not a bit.

ARTHUR. And if, after a year—

MANNOCK. Exactly.

ARTHUR. And you would absolve me of any charge of disloyalty, if—

MANNOCK. Of course! of course!

ARTHUR [*after thinking*]. Right you are, Father. I'll take it on.

[MANNOCK *turns away with a big sigh of relief.*]

MANNOCK. Thank you, old boy. I'm sure you won't regret it. . . . Oh, there's just one other thing. I shall keep you pretty busy. Better take a holiday now, while Reader is still here.

ARTHUR. Well—

MANNOCK. Hard up?

ARTHUR [*smiling*]. Fairly.

MANNOCK [*smiling*]. I'll see to that.

ARTHUR. I say, you are a sportsman. Thanks awfully!

MANNOCK. That's all right. [*Dismiss-*

ing him.] Well, I must go through my speech with Reader.

ARTHUR. That's to-morrow, isn't it? At Leeds.

MANNOCK. Yes.

ARTHUR [*smiling*]. Well, entirely without prejudice to my political opinions, I hope they won't throw anything at you.

[*He goes.* MANNOCK *laughs heartily until the door closes. Then, in a flash, his pleasant manner disappears. He walks to his desk and picks up the telephone.*]

MANNOCK. Hullo! Come in, will you? [*He sits down and writes out a cheque. While he is so engaged,* JOHN READER *comes in, a serious young man with the great virtues of industry and loyalty, but a pathetic lack of anything else.*] Ah, Reader, just wait a moment. Got the speech?

READER. Yes, sir.

MANNOCK [*getting up, cheque in hand*]. Good. All right?

READER. I have verified the dates and the extracts from other speeches. There was one misquotation from Wordsworth which I have corrected.

MANNOCK. I'm not sure that a misquotation isn't a good thing sometimes. Some fool is sure to write to the papers to point it out, and then one writes back and says that it's the fault of the reporter or the printer, and then the reporter writes and says — well, it's all publicity.

READER [*reproachfully*]. You remember what *The Spectator* said last week — the one member of the Cabinet who could be trusted not to bungle a literary quotation.

MANNOCK. Yes, well, that's something.

READER [*turning the pages*]. One or two little angularities of style I have ventured to — Oh, and then there's this passage. This was not in the Prime Minister's draft —

MANNOCK [*looking over his shoulder*]. No, it wasn't, was it?

READER. You seem to go some way beyond your colleagues. Of course it's not for me —

MANNOCK. Naturally.

READER. I just wanted to be sure that there was no mistake.

MANNOCK. There is no mistake, Reader — at present. It may be necessary for there to be one later on. I may find — later on — that I spoke from the wrong draft, in error. You understand?

READER. Quite so, sir. I thought I would just mention it.

MANNOCK. That's right. . . . And now, my dear fellow, I have something to tell you which I cannot flatter myself will be the distress to you that it is to me. The fact is that I am unable to avail myself of your services, your very great services, any longer.

READER [*utterly taken aback*]. You mean that I — that you —

MANNOCK. I'm afraid so, Reader.

READER. But what have I — aren't you —

MANNOCK. Perfectly satisfied. Oh, it's not that at all. I can recommend you with the utmost confidence, and, in fact, I will make it my business to see that you are comfortably settled with some one else. But my son is very anxious to get an insight into politics, and I have been thinking that the best way — it has been in my mind for some weeks, and he is delighted at the suggestion — the best way would be for him to take over your duties, and — [*fingering the cheque*]. In the circumstances, I have ventured to make this out for two months' salary, although I shall only require your services for one month longer. Here you are, my dear fellow.

READER [*mechanically*]. That's very good of you, sir. . . . It's a little awkward — my wife — coming just now — she's not — she will be — [*Looking at the cheque.*] Of course this is very generous of you —

MANNOCK. Not at all. I owe it to you. But you understand that I must think of my boy — it is his desire —

READER. Of course, sir. Naturally that comes first with you. I only wish — you see, just now my wife —

MANNOCK [*holding up his hand*]. I don't think, Reader, that I can be ex-

pected — [*Reproachfully.*] I can hardly be expected —

READER. No, no, of course not. . . . Coming just now — she will be frightened —

MANNOCK. I think that both of you will be distressing yourselves needlessly. There will be no difficulty whatever about finding you — I will speak to Mr. Capp to-morrow. Remind me. I fancy that Carfax —

[LADY JANE *comes in.*]

LADY JANE. Busy?

MANNOCK [*glad of the interruption*]. Oh no, not at all. [*To* READER.] Then that's understood. I will speak to-morrow to Mr. Capp. I think Carfax is the man. [*Taking the speech from him.*] Thank you. Good-night, Reader.

READER [*a trifle dazed*]. Good-night, sir. Good-night, Lady Jane.

LADY JANE. Good-night. [*He goes out.* LADY JANE *sits down gracefully.* MANNOCK *stands at the fireplace, turning over the pages of his speech.*] Arthur tells me he's coming to *you.*

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. I'm glad.

MANNOCK. You heard what he'd been doing?

LADY JANE. Yes. Silly boy.

MANNOCK. He didn't realize — and I didn't tell him.

LADY JANE. The least thing might make the difference now.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. Bertie tells me that C. J. is going to the Lords almost at once.

MANNOCK. I thought you knew.

LADY JANE. Not definitely. I suppose Mowbray will be Chancellor of the Exchequer?

MANNOCK. Sure to be.

LADY JANE. Bertie seemed to think it wasn't absolutely settled yet.

MANNOCK. The Duke doesn't like Mowbray, of course.

LADY JANE. No. . . . It's all been so sudden. We haven't had time to do anything.

MANNOCK. C. J. has been breaking up for months.

LADY JANE. Yes, but not publicly before. He might easily have lasted another year.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. Suppose it *is* Mowbray, who'll have the Admiralty? [MANNOCK *shrugs his shoulders.*] Would *you* take it?

MANNOCK [*not sure*]. What do you think?

LADY JANE. No.

MANNOCK. Yes, that's what I feel.

LADY JANE. "Too devoted to your present work," and so on. That always sounds well with the public.

MANNOCK. Yes. [*They smile faintly at each other, and are silent, both thinking. . . .*] Eversley gone?

LADY JANE. Yes.

MANNOCK. What did you do about that week-end?

LADY JANE. Left it vague. Said I'd write.

MANNOCK [*relieved*]. Ah! Then, in that case, I think perhaps —

LADY JANE. So do I. . . . It's always a mistake — trying to get back.

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . Bertie knew about him. The Garden Eversley.

LADY JANE [*surprised*]. Oh? . . . Oh! [*Meaning that, of course, that makes a difference.*] . . . Oh, then perhaps —

MANNOCK [*shaking his head*]. I think I would rather — He's a little disturbing.

LADY JANE. They always are — coming in suddenly from outside like that. Particularly when —

MANNOCK [*wishing to be fair*]. He was the Vicar's son, I was the Doctor's.

LADY JANE. Oh, *then,* yes. . . . [*She gets up.*] Shall I see you in the morning?

MANNOCK. I don't expect so. I have a fairly early train. There are the two meetings.

LADY JANE. Yes. . . . Leeds might make a difference.

MANNOCK. It might.

LADY JANE. I suppose Mowbray *is* a certainty?

MANNOCK [*with a shrug*]. He may not last long.

LADY JANE. If only we had seen it

coming. . . . Bertie doesn't think much of him.

MANNOCK. Bertie, no.

LADY JANE. Bertie counts for a good deal with the Prime Minister.

MANNOCK. Up to a point, yes. Not beyond.

LADY JANE. Still— [*She is silent for a little and then says.*] I sometimes wonder if Freda—[*and is silent again.*]

MANNOCK. It would help, of course.

LADY JANE. Yes. . . . Good-night.

[*She holds up her cheek and he kisses it carelessly.*]

MANNOCK. Good-night.

[*She goes out—to* FREDA'S *room, we may be sure.*]

[MANNOCK *glances at his speech, spreads it out on the desk beside him, puts on his glasses, and with a final glance at the opening, stands up and delivers it.*]

MANNOCK. Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen. In coming before you to-night at this great crisis in our political affairs, when, not for the first time in her eventful history our country stands at the parting of the ways, I am conscious—[*He glances at the speech and corrects himself.*]—I am not unconscious—I am not unconscious of a certain pride in the knowledge that it is before my own good friends of Yorkshire—my own people, as I must always think of them—that I am privileged to plead my cause. I was born on Yorkshire soil, I was nurtured through youth to early manhood in the bosom of your hills. Memories of my boyhood come back to me as I stand here to-night . . . memories of those happy days return to me [*and quite unexpectedly, just for a moment, they do. He breaks off, and says in a whisper*] Those happy days. . . . [*He is at Enderways now. There, armed to the teeth, march* NITE *and* SQUIER; *there, waiting to be rescued, sits the Buteus Maiden. Now it is* DICK *and* TEDDY *and* SALLY. *"Sally!" With a jerk he comes awake again, and hurries back to Leeds.*] And so, ladies and gentlemen, in delivering my message to you to-night—speaking as I do, not only for myself, but for the Government which I have the honor to represent. . . .

[*And so on. We can always read it in "The Times."*]

ACT II

SCENE I.—*Enderways, Yorkshire.*

[*It was known as* DICK'S *room in the old days, so perhaps we may still call it that. For a small boy, home for his holidays, it was all very well, this exciting nest in the roof, but it is terrible to think that a Cabinet Minister is now expected to sleep there.*

[*The room is empty at first, and in darkness. Then we hear a voice outside, and* LORD CARCHESTER *opens the door and puts the light on for us. So we get our one glimpse of him—*SALLY'S *husband; a big, easy-going, easy-moralled, rather battered man-of-the-world, who, as usual with him at this time of the night, has had just enough to drink and means to have one or two more.*]

CARCHESTER [*outside*]. Wait a moment. I'd better go first and put the light on. [*He does so, and makes way for* MANNOCK.] There you are.

MANNOCK [*coming in*]. Thanks. [*He sees the room.*] By Jove!

CARCHESTER [*for the tenth time*]. I really do apologize, but Sally insisted on it.

MANNOCK [*impatiently*]. My dear Carchester, of course! [*To himself.*] Of course she did.

CARCHESTER. Said you would understand.

MANNOCK. I understand.

[*He is still looking, looking at the room, drinking it in. The years are dropping off him.*]

CARCHESTER. Never argue with a woman. I've learnt that—[*the man-of-the-world laughs*]—if I've learnt nothing else.

MANNOCK [*carelessly*]. I shall be quite all right here, thanks.

[*He wants to be alone with the memories of the room.*]

CARCHESTER [*sitting down on the bed*]. Funny your turning out to be an old friend of Sally's like this.

MANNOCK. We were boy and girl together. I used to stay here in the holidays. [*With a deep sigh of remembrance.*] This was my room.

CARCHESTER. Ah well, then, that accounts for it. Still, why not be comfortable in a decent room when you can? [*He sinks into somnolence, rousing himself a moment to say sleepily.*] That was a damn good speech you made.

[MANNOCK *is not listening to his host; it is the room which is calling to him. He goes quickly to the window, to the cupboard, finding, remembering, missing. Suddenly he bends down, and turns back a corner of the carpet.*]

MANNOCK. Hullo!

CARCHESTER [*waking up with a start*]. What's the matter?

MANNOCK [*accusingly*]. There used to be a rat-hole here. It's been boarded up.

CARCHESTER. Good Lord, what do *you* do to rat-holes?

[*He settles down to sleep again. But not for long.*]

MANNOCK [*severely*]. That bed ought to be over here!

CARCHESTER [*dimly feeling that it is his fault*]. I beg your pardon, I didn't—

[*He tries to rise in apology, but sinks back again.*]

MANNOCK. Up against the wall.

[*He goes to the wall suddenly and taps; a peculiar rhythmic series of taps, just above where the bed used to be.*]

CARCHESTER. Hullo!

MANNOCK [*coming to himself with an apologetic laugh*]. Who sleeps there now?

CARCHESTER. The staff. I dunno. P'raps it's the cook. [*Wagging his head in reproof.*] Too old, Mannock, my boy. Too stout.

[MANNOCK *turns away in disgust. Then he goes back to the wall, and begins to talk, looking at* CARCHESTER, *but seeing only himself as a boy, thirty-five years ago.*]

MANNOCK. That was the signal. That meant "I want to talk to you." Then we talked to each other through the wall. One tap for A, two for B, and so on, spelling out messages. Oh, for hours sometimes . . . just making up things to say . . . plans for to-morrow . . . wonderful plans for tomorrow . . . adventures which never quite happened. "G" meant "Good-bye"—if one sent it, the other had to stop and go to sleep. "G. D." meant "Good-bye, dear"—that was when we had had a specially happy day together. Then, in the morning, the first one awake sent the signal. If the other one answered it, the first one sent "S. W."—that meant "Shall we?" Shall we get up? "Y" for "Yes," and we'd race each other to be first down on that old broken wall in the Wilderness.

[*He stops; he is racing to be first down;* SALLY'S *door flies open; she has the start of him. She can run—how she can run!—but he will catch her . . .* CARCHESTER *breaks in on his vision.*]

CARCHESTER. A damn good speech. [*He yawns.*] And mind you, I know what I'm talking about, because I was awake practically all the time. [*He struggles to his feet.*] I say, what about another spot of whisky?

MANNOCK [*curtly*]. No, thanks.

CARCHESTER. Just a little baby spot? You won't? Well, I will. Quite sure you're all right here?

MANNOCK. Yes, thanks.

CARCHESTER [*getting to the door*]. Well then, g'night.

MANNOCK. Good-night.

CARCHESTER [*after thought*]. G'night. [*He opens the door, and then turns round with the air of one having a message to deliver. He delivers it.*] G'night. [*He goes.*]

[MANNOCK *is alone with his room; alone with a thousand ghosts, a thousand memories; most of them*

happy ones, bringing a smile to his face; all of them tearing at that solemn mask of success in which, for so many years, he has hidden himself. You can see the mask falling from him, you can see those years dropping away. . . .

[*He takes off his coat and waistcoat and puts on a dressing-gown; takes off his shoes and puts on bedroom slippers. Then he sits on the bed, still smiling at his thoughts. He swings his feet up and puts his head back on the pillows, looking up at the well-remembered ceiling. He gives a deep sigh, and just breathes the word "Sally!" Sleepily he puts his hand up to the wall and gives that rhythmic knock. There is no answer; it is the wrong wall; it was a thousand years ago. But, still sleepily, he taps out G. D., "Goodbye, dear, God be with you, dear." Then his hand, coming down from the wall, feels the electric switch. With the happy sigh of one on the very threshold of sleep, he turns off the light . . . and the thousand ghosts, who have been waiting for him, rush thronging into his dreams. . . .*

* * * * *

[*Listen! Very faint, very far-off, a tune is coming — the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite . . . Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . .*

[*Now it comes again, clearer, louder . . . Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . .*

[*Now the* Dreadnought Nite *is here; here too is his faithful* Squier. . . . *Pom-perom-perompity-pom. . . . A whole orchestra of sound.*

[*Listen! It is only a child's trumpet. . . . And — see! — there are the children. For it is light now, and we can see where we are. Yet, even so, we are not quite certain. For there is the bed with* Mannock (*is it?*) *still lying there, but there also is that overgrown, tangled corner of the Wilderness, and the broken wall where* Dick *and* Sally *used to meet.*

[*"Pom-perom-perompity-pom." It is the faithful* Squier *who has the trumpet.* Nite, *in a paper cap, and with a martial sword in hand, leads the way.* Squier, *a toy gun hung round him, follows tooting. . . .*

[*Enough, however, of toots. Let* Nite *give tongue.*]

Nite [*singing lustily*].

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle,
That's the way the money goes —
Pop goes the weasel!

Come on, Squier!

Squier.

Half a pound of ham and eggs,
Half a pound of treacle —
That's the way —

Nite. That's *not* the way! It's "tuppenny rice."

Squier [*reproachfully*]. You know I *always* say ham and eggs, Nite!

Nite. Well, what's the good of being my Squier, if you don't sing the same as me? Squiers *always* sing the same as Nites.

Squier. *Sally* said —

Nite [*seeing* Mannock]. Hullo! Here's an old, dead gentleman.

Squier. Oughtn't I to salute him?

[*He unslings his gun.*]

Nite [*sternly*]. Wait till I give the order. Now then, Squier, shun! Shoulder — *arms!* [Squier *slopes.*] That's not shouldering arms, stupid, that's sloping.

Squier. That's all the shouldering you'll get. [*Proudly.*] We don't shoulder in *our* regiment.

Nite. Then you can jolly well take a month's notice, and I shall engage an entirely new Squier. [Squier *salutes, walks away a few paces and comes back again.*] Are you an entirely new Squier?

Squier [*saluting*]. Yes.

Nite. Then I shall give you 350 a year.

Squier. 350 what?

NITE. Oh, I dunno. Stand easy. [*Kindly.*] You can look at the old gentleman if you like.

SQUIER. [*looking*]. Is he a *very* old gentleman, Nite?

NITE. Not so tremendous. About 25 or 50 or something.

SQUIER. Is he dead?

NITE. Oh, a long time ago, I should think. Just as dead as dead.

SQUIER. Then I shall sing to him. [*Singing.*] "Half a pound—"

MANNOCK [*sitting up*]. I'm not dead. I've heard every word you've been saying.

NITE [*to* SQUIER]. He says he isn't dead.

SQUIER. Ask him if he can sing.

NITE. Can you sing?

MANNOCK. Rather!

NITE. All right, sing!

MANNOCK. "Half a pound of tuppenny rice, half a pound of treacle—"

NITE [*triumphantly*]. There you are, Squier!

SQUIER [*wistfully*]. I always say "Ham and eggs."

MANNOCK [*shaking his head*]. Wrong!

NITE. There you are, Squier!

SQUIER [*sadly*]. I don't like rice,

MANNOCK. Ah, but wait till you try the tuppenny sort. Whew!

SQUIER. Is that a bit better?

MANNOCK. Ever so much.

SQUIER. Oh! [*Humbly*]. Still, I think I'll go on saying ham and eggs, if you don't mind very much.

MANNOCK. Right!

NITE [*pointing to* SQUIER'S *trumpet*]. That's his loot, what he plays on.

SQUIER [*proudly*]. I got it at the sack of Jerusalem.

NITE. When there's a sack on, there's always a lot of loots. Almost everybody gets one. I lost mine. [*Carelessly.*] Don't mind, because a Nite has such a lot of fighting to do, he can't bother about loots. I say, where's the Buteus Maiden?

MANNOCK. That's just what I was going to ask *you*.

SQUIER. I'm going to shout for her. Shall we shout for her, Nite?

NITE. Yes, let's shout for her.

MANNOCK. All together. One, two, three— *Buteus Maiden!*

NITE [*apologetically*]. I don't expect she heard.

SQUIER. Perhaps she's being Sleeping Beauty, and is waiting for Nite to kiss her.

NITE [*rather hot and red*]. Shut up, Squier.

MANNOCK. Well, *I* shall try calling "Sally."

NITE. Yes, let's call Sally.

ALL. Sally! Sally! Sally!

BUTEUS MAIDEN. Here I am!

[*And here she is. Only ten at the moment, but as sweet, as precious, as daintily dignified, as our* SALLY *when she grew up.*]

NITE [*rushing to her—even then she was everything to him*]. O, Sally, you *have* been a long time. We've found an old, dead gentleman to play with us.

MANNOCK [*indignantly*]. I'm not dead! I'm not dead!

NITE. Yes, you are. Isn't he, Squier?

SQUIER. I thought he was at first. And then I thought p'raps he wasn't.

MANNOCK [*almost in tears*]. I'm *not* dead. I sha'n't play if he says I'm dead.

MAIDEN. Do play! Then that will show you're not.

MANNOCK. I'm a very important, successful man.

SQUIER. I saw at once he was a very important, successful man, so that's what made me think he was all dead. [*Kindly.*] But p'raps he isn't.

MANNOCK [*doggedly*]. I'm *not* dead.

NITE. Yes, he is.

MAIDEN [*to* NITE]. Dear, if he says he isn't dead, I don't think it would be kind not to believe him.

SQUIER. We can pretend he isn't anyhow.

MAIDEN [*to* NITE]. Please, dear.

NITE [*magnanimously*]. All right, we'll pretend you're alive, and see how you get on.

MANNOCK [*humbly*]. Thank you very much.

NITE [*moving him*]. Now you just stand there, out of the way. What shall we be, Squier?

SQUIER. I think — I think —

NITE. I know! We'll be Three Suitors. Sally, you sit over there — We'll be Three Suitors, Squier.

SQUIER [*wistfully*]. I suppose I sha'n't be the *Third* Suitor?

NITE. No, *I'll* be — [*Impatiently.*] Sally, why don't —

MAIDEN [*sitting down*]. Here I am, dear.

NITE [*to* MANNOCK]. What would you like to be? You could be another Squier, if you like.

[SQUIER *looks sadly at the* BUTEUS MAIDEN.]

MAIDEN [*gently*]. There couldn't be more than one Squier, dear.

MANNOCK [*hopefully*]. Could I be a Lord of High Degree?

NITE [*doubtfully, to* MAIDEN]. Could he?

MANNOCK. I'm a Right Honorable, really.

NITE. That's an *awful* thing to be.

MANNOCK [*humbly*]. Oh!

SQUIER. Couldn't he just be a wight or a varlet or something?

NITE. A wight of low renowne! A wight of low renowne! That's what he is. Isn't he, Sally?

MAIDEN. If you like, dear.

MANNOCK. Thank you very much.

NITE. Now, Squier goes first. We're all Suitors, and Squier goes first. Go on, Squier. [*In a whisper to* MANNOCK.] You go next.

[SQUIER *slopes his gun, makes a long detour of the castle walls, and arrives at the Great Gate. He pulls an imaginary bell.*]

NITE. Bom! Bom! Bom! [*To* MANNOCK.] That's the bell ringing inside to summon the agèd Seneschal. Go on, Squier.

SQUIER. What ho, within!

NITE [*as* SENESCHAL]. What ho, without!

SQUIER. Open the door, thou scurvy bald-pate!

NITE. What name, please?

SQUIER. Faithful Squier. I am come to pay attentions to thy mistress, the Buteus Maiden.

NITE. Not at home.

SQUIER. Have a care, agèd man, lest I carve thee to the brisket!

[*He pushes past the* SENESCHAL *into the* MAIDEN'S *presence.*]

MAIDEN [*turning to him*]. Who seeks me?

SQUIER. It is I, thy faithful Squier, who loves thee.

MAIDEN. Alas!

SQUIER. If thou wilt wed with me, I will give thee a golden castle, two palfreys, a box of fireworks and — and — lots of things.

MAIDEN [*drooping*]. I want none of these things.

SQUIER. Oh! . . . Not even a box of fireworks?

MAIDEN. No.

SQUIER. Oh! [*He salutes.*] Good-bye! [*He retreats.*]

NITE. Well done, Squier!

[SQUIER, *rather pleased with himself, lies down and rests.*]

MAIDEN [*kindly*]. Dear Squier.

[*She resumes her character.*]

NITE [*to* MANNOCK]. Now then, Low Renowne, it's your turn.

MANNOCK [*confidently*]. Right! [*He marches up to the castle gate and pulls the bell. There is dead silence. He pulls it again. Still there is silence. He looks round, a little alarmed, at* NITE.] This bell doesn't ring! [NITE *laughs loudly.* MANNOCK *rings it again, vigorously, but with no effect. He turns round to* NITE *again.*] I say — [*But* NITE *and* SQUIER *have vanished. He calls out loudly, frightened.*] I say!

[*There is no answer. The* BUTEUS MAIDEN *still waits silent.* MANNOCK *suddenly drops the bell, and attempts to push his way into the castle, but* DIGBY, *the immaculate butler, bars the way.*]

DIGBY. Yes, sir?

MANNOCK. Open the door, thou scurvy bald-pate.

DIGBY [*coldly*]. What name, please?

MANNOCK. Wight of Low Renowne.

DIGBY. Then it's no good your hanging about here. Only people of high renown, successful people, are allowed in *this* house.

MANNOCK. Have a care, agèd man, lest I carve thee to the brisket.

DIGBY [*calmly*]. Those are my instructions. Her ladyship is not at home to *any* of her husband's old friends. Mr. Selby Mannock says he might perhaps give you a job in the garden, if you come round to the back door.

MANNOCK [*desperately*]. But — but I've come to see the Buteus Maiden.

DIGBY [*contemptuously*]. Dressed like that?

MANNOCK. You don't understand. I've just come up from the country for a day. [*He turns round.*] Nite, how *can* I play this game if —

[*But* NITE *is not there; and when he turns back,* DIGBY *has vanished. He rings the bell again.* ARTHUR *appears.*]

ARTHUR. Name, please.

MANNOCK. Wight of Low Renowne.

ARTHUR [*coldly*]. I don't think I know him. Who is he?

MANNOCK. I — I don't — It was Nite, who —

ARTHUR. *Your* name, I think, is Richard Selby Mannock?

MANNOCK. Y — Yes.

ARTHUR. Then why do you give a false name? It only leads to misapprehension.

MANNOCK. I want to see the Buteus Maiden.

ARTHUR. Dressed like that?

MANNOCK. I — I —

ARTHUR. Look at yourself in the glass! A wight of low renowne! Have a glass of port! Have a cigar! A wight of low renowne!

MANNOCK [*turning round*]. Nite! I can't get in! People keep stopping me!

[*He turns back. Arthur has gone. He rings the bell. Bertie Capp is there.*]

BERTIE. Name, please.

MANNOCK. Selby Man — er — Wight of Low — er — [*pathetically*] I don't know.

BERTIE. I thought perhaps it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

MANNOCK. N — no, I don't think so.

BERTIE. What a pity! Couldn't you work it somehow? Pull a few strings? Talk to the Duke? Square an editor? I'm sure, if you had a little time, you could think of something. Ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to dinner! Invent a scandal about Mowbray! Intrigue a bit! Surely you can do *something!*

MANNOCK. I — I want to see the Buteus Maiden.

BERTIE. Dressed like that? Without the Chancellor's robes?

MANNOCK. I *must* speak to her! I want to tell her —

BERTIE. You know, that was a damn good speech of yours. The Prime Minister knows what he is talking about, and he says he was awake practically all the time.

MANNOCK. Let me in! I must get in!

BERTIE. I don't know what the Prime Minister will say. You see, Eversley — the Garden Eversley — has just given him a month's notice, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer — But, of course, if I were to marry Freda, we should keep it in the family. It all helps.

MANNOCK [*despairingly*]. Nite, Squier, where are you?

[*He pulls the bell again. To his surprise it rings — or is it the Buteus Maiden saying "Bom, bom, bom"? He takes a step forward, and is there at last — at her feet.*]

MAIDEN [*turning to him*]. Who seeks me?

MANNOCK. Er — er — [*but he can say nothing*].

MAIDEN [*leaning to him*]. Tell me.

MANNOCK [*struggling desperately to tell her*]. Er — er — [*and behold! Reader, his secretary, is prompting him.*] Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen!

MAIDEN [*turning away in disappointment*]. Oh!

MANNOCK [*longing to say just the one word "Sally" — and then, "Sally, I love you!" but Reader won't have it*]. Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen!

MAIDEN [*sadly*]. Have you nothing more to say to me?

MANNOCK [*after another desperate*

struggle]. Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen!

MAIDEN [*knowing that it is hopeless*]. Alas! he hath a sickness!

[*And now, suddenly, Nite and Squier have him by the arms, and are leading him away.*]

NITE. *That's* not the way, is it, Squier?

SQUIER [*sadly*]. I s'pose he *must* have been dead all the time.

NITE. *I'll* show you! Now you watch *me!* [*He walks bravely up to the Buteus Maiden. No door-bells, no parleyings for him.*] Buteus Maiden, I would speak with thee.

MAIDEN. Who seeks me?

NITE. It is I, thy love-lorn Nite.

MAIDEN [*wistfully*]. What wouldst thou, Nite?

NITE. Fain would I marry thee.

MAIDEN. Ah!

NITE. No jewels do I bring thee; no golden palaces do I offer thee; only —

MAIDEN [*whispering*]. Only — ?

NITE. Only my love and my faithful service.

MAIDEN [*getting down off the wall and giving him her hand*]. Then do I plight thee my troth.

[*He goes on one knee to her and kisses her hand. Then, her arm in his, he marches out of the castle, followed by the faithful Squier, who plays the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite.*]

MANNOCK [*as they go*]. Don't go! Don't go! [*But they go.*] Sally! Sally!

SQUIER [*popping back*]. Tell her it's Dick calling.

[*He hurries back after the others*].

MANNOCK. Sally! Where are you? It's Dick! [*He goes from one side to the other, calling* "Sally!" *and then* "It's Dick!" *And as he comes back to the castle, there she is, sitting on the wall in just the same attitude as that child Sally — and as beautiful, as dear. Nineteen, twenty; and* MANNOCK, *seeing her, is himself no older, so eagerly his face lights up.*] Ah, Sally, Sally!

[*At last he has found her again.*]

SALLY. Here I am, Dick.

MANNOCK. Where have you been? I've been looking for you.

SALLY. Just down by the river.

MANNOCK [*jealously*]. What were you doing?

SALLY. Just sitting in the buttercups, looking at the river.

MANNOCK. Is that all?

SALLY [*nodding*]. That's all, dear.

MANNOCK [*after a pause*]. Did you look at yourself in the river, Sally?

SALLY [*nodding*]. Yes.

MANNOCK [*with a deep sigh*]. Oh, Sally! [*There is so much that he cannot say, that words cannot express. She cannot help him now. She waits, tremulous.*] Sally, listen! [*She is listening. He taps his signal. She nods. Then he sends "I." She nods again.*] Did you get that?

SALLY. Yes.

MANNOCK. What was it?

SALLY. "I."

MANNOCK. That's right. That's all the word.

SALLY [*to herself*]. Dick.

MANNOCK. Listen!

[*He taps "L." She nods.*]

SALLY [*so gently*]. "L."

MANNOCK. That's right.

[*He taps "O." She nods.*]

SALLY [*as gently*]. "O."

MANNOCK. Yes.

[*He taps "V." When he gets as far as "U," he pauses a moment his hand up. Sally is waiting breathlessly. With a smile he makes it "V"; out comes her deep sigh of relief; she laughs back at him.*]

SALLY [*nodding*]. "V."

MANNOCK. Did you think it would be "V," Sally?

SALLY [*shyly*]. I wondered if it might be "V."

MANNOCK [*tapping "E"*]. There!

SALLY. "Love!" [*She looks straight in front of her seeing — who shall say what?*] "I love —"

MANNOCK. I haven't finished yet.

SALLY [*softly*]. No, you haven't finished yet.

MANNOCK. Shall I do the alphabet backwards for this letter?

SALLY. Does it come at the end of the alphabet?

MANNOCK. It does come rather at the end, Sally.

SALLY [*with a deep sigh of happiness*]. I think I'd like you to do it forward, Dick. [*Gently.*] To make it longer.

MANNOCK. All right.

[*He taps "Y." Breathlessly, her chin up, her eyes all love, Sally is counting.*]

SALLY [*certain now*]. Ah!

MANNOCK. Did you know it would be "Y," Sally?

SALLY [*ever so softly*]. I think I knew, Dick.

MANNOCK. Did you — did you want it to be "Y," Sally?

SALLY. Oh, I wanted it to be "Y"!

MANNOCK [*holding out his arms to her*]. Oh, Sally, Sally, I love you! Could you . . . do you —

SALLY [*nodding*]. Always, dearest, always.

MANNOCK. Sally!

[*If it were real, he would have her in his arms now, but it is a dream, insubstantial. Bertie and Freda are there suddenly, between them. They each have an arm of Mannock's, and are marching him away; yet talking to each other across him, as if he were not there.*]

BERTIE. As I said to the Prime Minister, the more these things are kept in the family, the better.

FREDA. That's just what Father said, when Marjory married Robert.

BERTIE. It will be useful for me, my wife being the Chancellor's daughter, and it will be useful for your Father, his daughter being married to the Prime Minister's secretary.

FREDA. Exactly, Bertie. It all helps.

[*They have let go of* MANNOCK, *and are now arm-in-arm, but still talking as if he had never been there.*]

BERTIE. In these days, we must stick together, or where are we?

FREDA. Exactly! Where *are* we?

[*And they are gone. But, alas! Sally is gone too.*]

MANNOCK. Sally! Where are you?

[*He hurries from one side to the other, calling for her. But it is Eversley, as old as when we last saw him, who appears.*]

MANNOCK [*turning round with a shout of welcome*]. Teddy!

EVERSLEY. I beg your pardon?

MANNOCK [*coming closer*]. I'm sorry, sir — you looked much younger — I thought at first —

EVERSLEY [*smiling*]. Not at all. Very charming of you to think so. You live here, I suppose?

MANNOCK [*charmingly boyish*]. I'm staying here. Teddy and I stay here in the vac. sometimes. We're up at Cambridge. At least, we've just come down.

EVERSLEY [*smiling*]. And what are you going to do?

MANNOCK. I'm going to the Bar. But — [*shyly*] I want to write.

EVERSLEY. Ah!

MANNOCK. You see, you don't get much money at the Bar, and I *must* have *some*, because you see — you see, Sally and I — we've just got engaged.

EVERSLEY. O youth, youth! Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. But to be young was very heaven!

MANNOCK. Only between ourselves, you know. We sha'n't tell anybody until I'm making a living.

EVERSLEY. I sha'n't say a word — except just to myself sometimes, "Bless them."

MANNOCK [*shyly*]. I say, thanks awfully. Sally would love that.

EVERSLEY. Perhaps I shall be able to give you a hand later on. I write too. I daresay I could introduce you — a word in the right ear —

MANNOCK. I say, that's awfully decent of you. I don't suppose I'm much good. But it's fun. . . . It *is* fun, isn't it? I mean being alive . . . and trying . . . and wondering . . . and having somebody else who wonders too. . . . Oh, what a lot there is in the world that nobody knows anything about! All the lovely things! All the precious things! [*Ashamed suddenly*] I say, I'm awfully sorry — talking such rot —

EVERSLEY. Keep on looking for the lovely things. . . . And bless you both.

LADY JANE [*off*]. Edward!

[MANNOCK *looks up at the voice.*]

EVERSLEY. There she is!

[*Lady Jane comes on in full evening dress.*]

LADY JANE. Ah, there you are, Edward!

[MANNOCK *gazes at her, struggling with horrible memories.*]

EVERSLEY. Here I am, my dear. [*To* MANNOCK.] This is my wife, Lady Jane.

MANNOCK [*to himself*]. *His* wife! [*He draws a deep breath of relief.*] How do you do?

LADY JANE [*casually*]. How do you do? Are we ready, Edward?

EVERSLEY. Yes, my dear.

[*They turn and go off together, talking loudly to each other as if Mannock was not there.*]

LADY JANE. Who is he?

EVERSLEY. Just a nice young man.

LADY JANE. He looks as if he had possibilities. Ask him to Drayton, if you like. He might do.

[*They are gone.*]

MANNOCK [*still looking for her*]. Sally, where *are* you? . . . Sally!

[*Nite and Squier march across, singing the Dreadnought war song.*]

SQUIER [*as they disappear*]. Say, it's Dick calling.

MANNOCK. Sally! Where are you? It's Dick!

[*And there she is, on her wall again, just as if she had never gone.*]

SALLY. Here I am, dear.

MANNOCK [*rushing to her*]. O, Sally, I've had the most awful dream! I dreamed—just for a moment—I was married to—to somebody else. It was horrible. And then I couldn't find you, and—O Sally, it *is* you, isn't it? Say it's you.

SALLY [*nodding*]. It is, dearest, it is. Never mind the dream.

MANNOCK. It couldn't happen, could it?

SALLY [*trembling*]. Oh, it couldn't, it couldn't. . . . Oh, if it did!

MANNOCK [*comforting her*]. It couldn't, Sally. It will always be you.

SALLY. It was always you. From the very first. Those dear, silly games we played as children—do you remember?—

MANNOCK. I remember.

SALLY. I think I *liked* Teddy better—[*doubtfully*] I think he was *nicer*, Dick—[*hurriedly*]. Oh no, no, he wasn't—

MANNOCK. He was. I was a little beast.

SALLY. You weren't, you weren't. It was always you. . . . I loved Teddy; I love him now; it's sort of friendly, loving *him*. But you were different. It's sort of terrible, loving *you*, Dick. You're right in my heart, so twined that it can hardly beat without hurting me. You can't go now; not unless you tear my heart out too.

MANNOCK. I'm happy being in your heart.

SALLY. It was always you. I used to say to myself when we were children, "SQUIER's heaps nicer, *really*"—[*nodding*]. Yes, he was—but Squier couldn't hurt me. Only you could hurt me. I think that was how I knew that I loved you.

MANNOCK. I won't hurt you, darling. Never again.

SALLY [*wistfully, wondering at his innocence*]. Oh, my dear! . . . [*very gently.*] If you stop hurting me, I have stopped loving you.

MANNOCK [*softly*]. I will stay in your heart.

SALLY [*putting her hands to her heart*]. You are all that I have there.

[*They are silent together. . . . Very faintly the War Song of the Dreadnought Nite is heard. Sally stands up.*]

SALLY. Come, dearest.

MANNOCK. I come, my beautiful.

SALLY. Into the world, for whatever the world may send, but always together.

MANNOCK. Always together, my lovely.

[*They begin to move, but are held there. It is a deputation arriving. The War Song grows louder, as all the people of* MANNOCK's *dream file in. Now they are between Sally and her lover. She calls to him with*

her eyes, "Come, dearest," *but he cannot. . . . She is gone.*]

DIGBY. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The Chancellor of the Exchequer will now put on his robe of office.

[*The deputation solemnly presents* MANNOCK *with the robe and departs with dignity.*]

MANNOCK. Half a moment, Sally, I must just put this on. [*He struggles into it.*] Sally! [*He looks up, still struggling. She is not there.*] Wait a moment, Sally! [*He struggles.*] Sally, I must get this on! Don't you understand, dear? . . . [*Frightened.*] Sally! Wait for me! [*Desperately.*] Sally! . . . Sally! —

[*But he has lost her.*]

ACT II

A Corner of the Wilderness

SCENE II.—*It is early morning, perhaps seven o'clock, in that corner of the Wilderness which we have already seen in* MANNOCK'S *dream. On the wall sits* SALLY, LADY CARCHESTER, *a woman in the forties now, but still our* SALLY. MANNOCK, *seeking the fresh air after a restless night, his dream still strong upon him, comes suddenly upon her.*

MANNOCK [*with a shout*]. Sally! Oh, my darling! [*And then he realizes suddenly.*] I beg your pardon! [*He is staggered at what he has said.*] I — I beg your pardon, Lady Carchester. Please forgive me.

SALLY [*smiling sadly*]. It's all right.

MANNOCK. I'm really — What can you think? My only excuse — but I'm ashamed to give it.

SALLY. Please tell me.

MANNOCK [*with a laugh*]. It's absurd. [*Then he tells her.*] I dreamt last night — the most vivid, absurd — [*softly*] the most wonderful dream. You and I — here; first as children, then — afterwards. Sometimes I seemed to be looking on at myself; in some funny way there were two of me. Sometimes you were a child, sometimes you were grown up. But always it was you and I. Other people came in; everybody; you know how; but always you and I. Here. Just where you are sitting now — just where, just how, you always used to sit. . . . And then I woke up and came out here — it was early, nobody else could be up — and there you were. Just as you always used to sit.

SALLY [*leaning back on her hands and nodding*]. I understand.

MANNOCK. Don't! Don't!

SALLY. What?

MANNOCK [*in distress*]. It's the Sally I used to know! Everything. The way she sits, the way she talks, the way she moves. Oh, Sally, don't! [*He recovers himself with an effort.*] I beg your pardon.

SALLY [*smiling faintly*]. It's all right.

MANNOCK [*trying not to look at her*]. I've never had such a real dream. It almost seems as if *you* must have been dreaming it too. [*With an awkward laugh.*] Were you?

SALLY. I have those dreams.

[*Poor dear, it's all she has.*]

MANNOCK. I suppose it was being in that room again. [*With a laugh.*] There are ghosts in that room, Lady Carchester.

SALLY. There are ghosts in every room — in every corner of the gardens —

MANNOCK. And here.

SALLY. And here. . . .

MANNOCK. It must be — how many years since we met?

SALLY. I don't know. . . . Did your speeches go off well?

MANNOCK. I think so. Yes. I don't know.

SALLY. I expect they did . . . I'm sorry I wasn't up when you came. I went to bed early.

MANNOCK. We were late. Nearly midnight. I dined at the hotel, in between the speeches.

SALLY. I thought you would . . . I thought you wouldn't mind if I was not up when you came.

MANNOCK. But you were. [*She turns to him.*] In every room — in every cor-

ner of the house. . . . I tapped on the wall — G.D. [*Gently to himself.*] Goodbye, dear. That's "God be with you, dear."

SALLY [*softly*]. I heard it.

[*And suddenly, the unearthly sweetness of his dream still with him,* MANNOCK *forgets that he is married, father of a family, an important and successful man; forgets that this is Lady Carchester. They are boy and girl still, just as in the dream. Is it too late?*]

MANNOCK. Sally, Sally, I love you! Oh, my beautiful, I've always loved you. It's too late now — I've thrown your love away — but I love you, I love you. O, just to say it again — I love you.

SALLY [*whispering to herself*]. Oh, just to hear you say it again — "I love you."

MANNOCK. I've thrown them away — all the lovely things of life, all the precious things. I've thrown them away — for nothing. Oh, if you could forgive me — it's too late now, but if you could forgive me! I've hurt you, but I've hurt myself more, for it was always you. How can you forgive me? I tore myself out of your heart — you said that would hurt you, Sally — but if you could forgive!

SALLY. I forgive, dearest.

MANNOCK. Success! It closes in on you. That's what Teddy said. I tried to get free — I did try, Sally — but I couldn't. It had got me. It closes in on you.

SALLY. I understand, dearest.

MANNOCK. Oh, but just to say "I love you, Sally," again!

SALLY. Oh, just to hear you say it, dearest.

MANNOCK [*timidly*]. I suppose you couldn't say "I love you, Dick." Oh no, how can I ask it?

SALLY. "If you stop hurting me, I have stopped loving you" — do you remember?

MANNOCK [*remorsefully*]. Sally!

SALLY [*her hand to her heart*]. It has never stopped hurting . . . I had to make something of my life. To sit alone with Pain — [*She shakes her head.*] I had to make something of it. But it has never stopped hurting.

MANNOCK. Oh, my dear! Forgive me.

SALLY. It is early. We are alone with the world. This is part of the dream — you and I. And so — I love you, Dick.

MANNOCK [*humbly*]. Thank you, Sally.

SALLY [*giving him her hand*]. It is part of the dream.

[*They are hand in hand — silent.*]

MANNOCK [*quietly*]. Need it be a dream? There is so much in the world that nobody knows anything about — is it too late to find it together?

SALLY [*trembling*]. It is only part of the dream, dearest.

MANNOCK [*earnestly*]. Need it be? Here we are, you and I — need it be a dream?

SALLY [*how she loves him*]. Your career.

MANNOCK [*bitterly*]. My career! My successful career! [*He tears it away.*] Let me get away from it! Help me to get away from it! It is not too late. Come with me, my beautiful.

SALLY [*her last defence*]. It means giving up everything.

MANNOCK [*triumphantly*]. It means finding everything. . . .

SALLY [*quietly*]. I have always loved you. From the first — from the very first. It was always you. It is you now. If you want me — if you think it is not too late — if it would be better for you — [*She breaks off, and then begins again.*] I don't know if it's wrong. I don't know much about Right and Wrong. But I think, perhaps, that there are some wrongs which are better and braver than Right, and some rights which are worse and more destroying than Wrong. . . . It is only of you I am thinking. If it would be better for you — [*she breaks off again, and then nods gently to herself*] I will come with you, dearest.

MANNOCK. Sally, my lovely one! [*He holds out his hands to her; she takes them.*] But you *want* to come? You do love me still — after all I've done to you? Say "I love you, Dick."

SALLY [*from her broken heart*]. God knows how I love you, Dick.

MANNOCK. Oh, my dear, my dear! [*He kisses her hands reverently, and is silent for a little. Then, thinking it out slowly, now for the first time seeing the thing as it is, he says.*] Now then, you must give me a week, a week to get out of it all, a week to get clear. Sally, you *do* see, don't you? I can't only think of myself — now. Not now. That was the old way — only myself — my success — my career — but now! I must get out of it all first. I must have a week — to get clear.

SALLY [*perhaps she guesses*]. You must have a week — to be certain.

MANNOCK [*confidently*]. Oh, I'm certain enough. [*He laughs happily.*]

SALLY. Yet I want you to have a week. Not seeing me, not writing to me. I can do nothing for you now, dear. It is for you. . . . Here am I. If, at the end of a week, you want me, tell me where you want me, and I will come.

MANNOCK. There is a place I've seen, a little sleepy village between hills; you will feel at rest there. Nobody comes, nobody will know us. When we are there together, then I will try to thank you.

SALLY [*seeing it then, if never afterwards*]. I will wait for you to say "Come!"

MANNOCK [*nodding*]. A week. Only a week. [*He makes a movement as if to go; she too.*] No, don't move! Let me have this picture of you for our last week away from each other. . . . Hands behind you in that way you always had. There! Sally the child, Sally the girl, Sally the woman — and always my beloved. [*Clasping his hands to her.*] Oh, my lovely!

[*He is gone; she waits there. So it was twenty-five years ago. So it is now.*]

ACT III

SCENE 1.—*Cavendish Square. It is the afternoon of the same day. Bertie, ushered in by* DIGBY, *comes into the empty library. He has just been told that Mr. Mannock is not yet home.*

BERTIE [*looking at his watch*]. I suppose the train was late.

DIGBY. No, sir. Apparently not. The car has returned with Mr. Mannock's dressing-case.

BERTIE. Then where —

DIGBY. I understand from Lawson that Mr. Mannock gave instructions that he would be walking home.

BERTIE [*amazed*]. Walking! Why?

DIGBY. Naturally I can't say, sir, except that it is a fine afternoon, and that Mr. Mannock may have felt in good spirits.

BERTIE. Good spirits! Good Lord!

DIGBY. Yes, sir. Even if he walked all the way he should be here very soon now, sir. Of course, if he popped on to a 'bus —

BERTIE. My good Digby, you can't pop on to a 'bus without years of practice. If he has taken his life in his hands like that, he may be at Crouch End, or God knows where, by now. Well, I shall wait, if I wait all day.

DIGBY. Yes, sir.

BERTIE. Tell her ladyship I'm here.

DIGBY. Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.* BERTIE *sits down with a paper and waits.* FREDA *comes in.*]

FREDA. Hullo, Bertie.

BERTIE [*getting up and taking her hand*]. Hullo, Freda. [*Petulantly.*] Why on earth do you let your Father dash off to Cricklewood like this?

FREDA. Is that where he is?

BERTIE. *I* don't know. Oh, confound their knavish tricks!

FREDA [*surprised*]. Bertie, you're quite ruffled.

BERTIE. I've had a ruffling morning.

FREDA. Bobo a trifle tetchy?

BERTIE. If you are referring to the Prime Minister —

FREDA. I am.

BERTIE. The answer is in the affirmative. "Tetchy," perhaps, hardly does it justice.

FREDA. How very grim for you.

BERTIE. Oh, I shall survive.

FREDA. I'm sure you will. You're the surviving sort. [*She sits down.*]

BERTIE [*thoughtfully*]. Now I wonder if that's a compliment or not.

[*He sits down too.*]

FREDA. Well, I shouldn't have much use for anybody who wasn't a survivor.

BERTIE. Ah, then it *is* a compliment.

FREDA. Of course it is.

BERTIE [*tentatively*]. But if he *were* a survivor, if he very distinctly were, then you — you could imagine yourself having some slight use for him?

FREDA [*demurely*]. You might go as far as that, Mr. Capp — quit unofficially.

BERTIE. Yes. . . . I'm forty. I just mention it.

FREDA. I'm nineteen. I just throw it out.

BERTIE. In a mid-Victorian novel I should point out sadly that I was old enough to be your father.

FREDA. And in a modern novel I should agree that, if you had married at twenty, and got to work at once, you might just have done it.

BERTIE [*after a pause*]. Did I tell you that my Uncle Joseph died the other day?

FREDA. No. . . . My sister's small baby has just been vaccinated.

BERTIE [*reproachfully*]. He was the rich one, you know.

FREDA. Oh, I beg his pardon! [*Tactfully.*] Did he — was his mind clear at the last?

BERTIE. Perfectly, I'm glad to say.

FREDA. How clear?

BERTIE. About a hundred and twenty thousand.

FREDA [*delighted*]. Bertie, what a brain!

BERTIE [*looking at her proudly*]. You know, every now and then, you're just like the Freda of ten years ago, who used to sit on my knee and try to wear my eye-glass.

FREDA. My dear Bertie, surely I've sat on your knee since then!

BERTIE. Not so systematically.

FREDA [*sitting on it and wearing his eye-glass*]. But how absurd to let these old customs die out. [*After a pause.*] Have you actually proposed to me yet?

BERTIE [*with dignity*]. I am just going to.

FREDA. I don't want to hurry you.

BERTIE [*beginning*]. Freda!

FREDA. Yes?

BERTIE. What about it? I should like to be married to you — tremendously.

FREDA. Nice person.

BERTIE. Would you care about it at all?

FREDA. Terribly.

BERTIE. I think your Father and Mother would like the idea. I don't know if that matters nowadays.

FREDA. My dear Bertie, of course it does. Family quarrels are so vulgar — besides upsetting things. I want you to get on.

BERTIE. Quite. . . . Then that's all right.

FREDA. Yes, that's all right.

BERTIE. Do we celebrate it in the usual way?

FREDA. Well, we shall have to begin some time. [*Kissing him.*] Dear Bertie!

BERTIE [*rather moved*]. Thank you. I'll try not to let you down.

[LADY JANE *comes in. Bertie, full of apologetic noises, struggles to get up.*]

FREDA [*calmly*]. Subterfuge is useless, Bertie. [*She gets off his knee.*] Bertie has just asked me to marry him, Mother.

LADY JANE [*delighted*]. My dear Bertie! How — [*She seeks for the right word*] — how satisfactory! [*She holds out her hand, which he kisses.*] I am *so* glad. [*To* FREDA.] Dear child!

[*She puts up a cheek.*]

FREDA. Tell her about your Uncle Joseph.

BERTIE. He died, you know, the other day.

LADY JANE. Not unexpectedly, I hope?

BERTIE. Oh, no! On the contrary.

LADY JANE. That's a comfort. And — all satisfactory?

BERTIE. Very.

LADY JANE. You must tell Richard the details. [*To* FREDA.] Run along now,

dear. Bertie really came here on business, I suspect. [*To him.*] Isn't that so?

FREDA [*holding up a finger*]. Now, Bertie, don't say I was just an accident.

BERTIE. A delightful interlude.

FREDA. That's better. But I still think —

LADY JANE. Nonsense, Freda, you know how busy Bertie is.

FREDA. "For men must work, and women must weep. . . ." I shall be weeping upstairs, if you want another interlude before you go.

BERTIE [*opening the door for her*]. Rather! Of course I do. [*She goes out. He closes the door and comes quickly to* LADY JANE.] I say, what about it? You read the speech, of course.

LADY JANE. Naturally.

BERTIE. The P.M.'s furious.

LADY JANE. That's also natural.

BERTIE. Did you know he was going to? I beg your pardon, I oughtn't to have asked you that.

LADY JANE. I knew what Richard's views were. Naturally.

BERTIE. Well, of course, we all did. [*He takes a turn up and down.*] Look here, we had a draft of the speech. Knowing his views, the P.M. insisted on it. That draft merely echoed the policy of the Cabinet. It went no further. I brought it back to Mannock the night before last, and told him that the P.M. approved. He goes down to Leeds, gives 'em the speech, and at the critical point throws over the Cabinet and dashes off on his own. Just as we were afraid he would.

LADY JANE. It won't be difficult to explain that.

BERTIE. So I told the P.M. Naturally he feels that he has been done, Mannock having practically promised him that the other speech was —

LADY JANE [*horrified*]. Bertie, you're not suggesting anything against Richard's honor!

BERTIE [*equally horrified*]. Good Lord, of course I'm not!

LADY JANE. But is the Prime Minister?

BERTIE [*apologetically*]. You must make allowances for him. You see, he's just getting over influenza. When he's quite strong again, he'll see that it's ridiculous to talk about honor — it's just a question of tactics. But at present — well, you know how you feel after influenza.

LADY JANE [*in the voice of one who knows the explanation by heart*]. It's perfectly simple. Richard made a private memorandum of his own views, which he intended to lay before the Cabinet. Accidentally, owing to some carelessness of his secretary, this must have been included in the first draft of the speech. When it was discovered, the speech was typed out afresh and sent to the Prime Minister. Richard, again owing to some carelessness, took the earlier draft to Leeds.

BERTIE [*also knowing it by heart*]. Quite, quite.

LADY JANE. Richard will tell us what happened then. He may have found himself in the middle of it before he realized that he had the wrong draft, and have been carried away. Or he may have thought that this was the draft which had been submitted to the Prime Minister, and that the P.M., though not approving it, had wished a kite to be flown, knowing that he could always repudiate Richard afterwards.

BERTIE. Quite.

LADY JANE. Of course it was careless of Reader. He has been dismissed, by the way.

BERTIE. Quite. Oh, there are plenty of explanations. And if the P. M. had been in normal health —

LADY JANE. What does he want?

BERTIE. Well, he wants an explanation of some kind, and he wants it for the Press. And he wants something pretty humble from Mannock personally. And he wants to smoke very badly and can't, because of his throat — that's really what's worrying him.

LADY JANE. Oh! . . . Oh, well! . . . Who's going to the Admiralty?

BERTIE [*uncomfortably*]. Nothing's settled as far as I know. And won't be until he's well again.

LADY JANE. Not even Mowbray?

BERTIE. No. . . .

LADY JANE. Bertie, you're one of the family now. Tell me frankly: is it certain that Mowbray will be Chancellor of the Exchequer?

BERTIE. Nothing is certain.

LADY JANE. Oh! Well, that's something. [*After a pause.*] Has Leeds done Richard any harm?

BERTIE. At the moment, yes, certainly. Ultimately, I should say, no.

LADY JANE. He's played the wrong card?

BERTIE. I think so. But you never know. The P.M.'s queer in some ways. And it depends a little on how the Press takes it up. They were very noncommittal this morning.

LADY JANE. In the circumstances, to be non-committal is to be on our side.

BERTIE. Quite. . . . [*Looking at his watch.*] But where *is* he, where *is* he? What's all this about walking home?

LADY JANE. Walking home? What do you mean?

BERTIE. Why, Digby said — [*And now Mannock comes in.*] Ah!

MANNOCK [*cheerfully*]. Hullo, Bertie. Digby told me you were here. [*To his wife.*] Ah, you've been looking after him. That's good.

[*He is younger than when we first saw him, more eager.*]

BERTIE. We wondered what had happened to you.

MANNOCK. I sent the car on and walked. It was such a jolly afternoon.

LADY JANE. Walked! From Euston?

[*She looks at him in amazement.*]

MANNOCK. Yes. Such a jolly afternoon.

LADY JANE. Oh! . . . [*Before words come to her, she decides that, after all, it doesn't matter very much.*] Bertie has come round about the speech.

MANNOCK [*at a loss*]. Speech?

LADY JANE. He thinks it was a mistake in tactics as it turns out.

BERTIE. Yes, but there's more to it than that. The P.M. —

MANNOCK. Oh, the speech! Oh, I see.

LADY JANE. I was telling him that that could easily be explained.

BERTIE. Quite.

LADY JANE. He thinks — oh, by the way, we may regard Bertie as one of the family now. Freda —

BERTIE. Please.

LADY JANE. Freda —

MANNOCK. Freda and Bertie?

LADY JANE. Yes. I have told Bertie how delighted we are.

MANNOCK [*violently*]. No! I won't have it!

LADY JANE [*amazed*]. Richard!

BERTIE [*equally amazed*]. Why, what —

MANNOCK [*recovering himself with an effort*]. I beg your pardon.

LADY JANE. But I don't understand. Only the other day —

MANNOCK. I want Freda to marry for love . . . I'm sorry, Bertie. Perhaps she does love you.

BERTIE [*embarrassed*]. Well, I — I don't understand. I asked her to marry me, and she — apparently she —

MANNOCK. Are you in love with *her*?

BERTIE [*out of his depth*]. Well, I — I asked her to marry me, and — Yes, of course I am. I mean — [*Bewildered.*] I don't understand.

MANNOCK. Good God, man, you must know if you're in love or not.

LADY JANE [*interposing firmly*]. Bertie, perhaps you wouldn't mind fetching Freda.

BERTIE [*relieved*]. Right.

[*He goes out.*]

LADY JANE. Thank you . . . Richard, what's the matter? What has happened?

[MANNOCK *takes a turn up the room, wondering how much to tell her, when to tell her.*]

MANNOCK [*looking up suddenly*]. Do you mean about Freda?

LADY JANE. Why this sudden change? Two nights ago we were both saying —

MANNOCK. That's just it. I want to be sure that she is not doing it just because she thinks we want it.

LADY JANE. I probably know Freda better than you —

MANNOCK. I don't know her at all.

LADY JANE. Then you may take my word for it that, if she marries anybody, it will be because she wants to do so.

MANNOCK [*thoughtfully*]. Yes, I suppose so. [*With a laugh to himself.*] After all, it hasn't really very much to do with me—now.

LADY JANE. Naturally we both want her to be happy. Bertie has come into money, he tells me. I suppose he was waiting for that. I think it's the most satisfactory thing that could have happened.

MANNOCK [*thoughtfully*]. Yes, I'm not sure that it isn't.

LADY JANE. Well, then!

MANNOCK. Yes. . . . [*To himself.*] God, how difficult it all is, when you get close to it.

LADY JANE. All what?

MANNOCK [*waving his hands*]. Life. Everything.

[*Before* LADY JANE *can take his temperature,* BERTIE *and* FREDA *come in.*]

FREDA. What is it?

MANNOCK. Come here, Freda. [*She comes to him, looking up into his face.*] Fond of Bertie?

FREDA [*smiling*]. I've adored him for years.

MANNOCK. Going to be happy with him?

FREDA. I hope so.

MANNOCK [*kissing her forehead*]. Well, good luck to you both. [*Shaking* BERTIE'S *hand.*] Good luck to you, Bertie.

LADY JANE. I think Freda is a very lucky girl. Bertie has a wonderful career in front of him.

BERTIE [*modestly*]. Well, I hope—

FREDA. Oh, Bertie's all right.

MANNOCK [*with a note of dismissal*]. All right, Freda. I just wanted to feel quite sure—That's all right, Bertie.

[*Bertie opens the door for Freda, who goes out.*]

LADY JANE. Now then, tell Richard just what you were telling me.

[*She sits down for it.*]

BERTIE [*coming back to them*]. Well, what it really comes to—

MANNOCK [*smiling to himself happily*]. I have sent in my resignation to the Prime Minister.

LADY JANE. Richard! Is that wise? At this moment? [*She turns to Bertie for help.*] Bertie?

BERTIE [*shaking his head*]. He's in the mood to accept it. You can't hold a pistol to his head just now.

LADY JANE. That's what I felt. [*Anxiously to her husband.*] Has the letter gone?

MANNOCK. It has gone.

BERTIE. Good Lord!

LADY JANE. Is it too late? [*To* BERTIE.] Can't you—

MANNOCK [*patiently*]. I have resigned. He will accept my resignation. He can't help himself. Well, I intend him to. That's why I resigned.

LADY JANE [*with restraint*]. I don't want to—I daresay you know best. But surely it was a matter which should have been discussed first. You must think that it was wise, or you wouldn't have done it. But at least let us hear your reasons. Here are Bertie and I, only too anxious to help.

[MANNOCK *looks at her—and at* BERTIE. *A smile comes on his face as he imagines himself saying, "Well, the fact is, I am running away with another woman." Impossible, of course, with* BERTIE *there. Impossible anyhow, yet. He cannot mention* SALLY'S *name in this atmosphere; cannot hint that there is another woman, for fear of* SALLY'S *being identified. Impossible to discuss her, them, the situation, with anybody. Unless it were a friend of* SALLY'S. EVERSLEY, *perhaps. But he must be out of the Government first. Some such thoughts as these are in his mind, even if we cannot read them.*]

MANNOCK. Well, yes, that's reasonable. And yet—it's no good. I can't explain now. Except to say that I'm doing it with my eyes open. [*In a whisper.*] At last. [*To* LADY JANE.] You must give me a week—then I'll explain everything.

LADY JANE [*uncertain*]. Well—of course you know best—

BERTIE [*quite certain*]. That's all

right, Lady Jane. [*He almost winks at her.*] I understand.

LADY JANE. Do you really think—

BERTIE. You never can tell with the P.M. I've said that before. Mannock's way—he has always played his cards well—there's something up his sleeve—you leave it to him.

[MANNOCK *has wandered away in search of an A.B.C. Trains don't touch that sleepy little village between hills, but they can bring lovers within reach of it. Just to look up the train is something.*]

LADY JANE [*nodding to* BERTIE]. Very well. If you think—

BERTIE. He knows what he's doing.

LADY JANE. Very well, Richard. You do it your own way. Meanwhile—

BERTIE. Meanwhile no harm in letting it be known that—

LADY JANE. Important changes in the Cabinet are pending.

BERTIE. Well, yes, *that*—

LADY JANE. I'll ask Roger Coombes to lunch to-morrow, and drop a hint.

BERTIE. Yes . . . I was going to say that I could let fall a word or two. By the way, perhaps we'd better say nothing about Freda until this is safely over. I should like to be able to preserve my impartiality for what it's worth. A suggestion that, from what I have seen of Mannock lately, he is tired of the confinements of his present office—

LADY JANE. And that a post of greater freedom—

BERTIE. And more responsibility—exactly. [*Chuckling.*] Otherwise he seriously thinks of retiring from public life altogether.

LADY JANE [*laughing at the absurdity of it*]. I think that can be safely left to you, Bertie. And you're right about Freda. I hope she hasn't been ringing up all her friends. I'd better see about that at once.

BERTIE. I'll come along too. Well, so long, Mannock.

MANNOCK [*who was just stepping out of the train*]. Going?

BERTIE. You'll be seeing some more of me before very long, I expect. [*With sudden enthusiasm.*] By Jove, if you play this hand properly, I believe—well, almost anything might happen.

MANNOCK [*happily*]. I believe it might, Bertie.

[LADY JANE *and* BERTIE *go out.*]

[MANNOCK, *with the A.B.C. in his hands, is back in the train with* SALLY. . . . *This time it is Reader who interrupts them.*]

READER. Are you busy, sir?

MANNOCK [*looking up*]. No . . . no.

READER [*formally*]. I gather, from what I have read in the papers, that I accidentally gave you the wrong draft of the speech. It was very careless of me, and I wish to express my regret.

MANNOCK [*smiling*]. *Very* careless of you, Reader.

READER [*his first smile in* MANNOCK'S *house*]. I thought I had better mention it.

MANNOCK. Thank you. . . . But we are not bothering about that now.

READER. Oh?

MANNOCK. No. Life has other things to offer than speeches at Leeds. . . . [*Suddenly remembering.*] By the way, what were you trying to tell me about Mrs. Reader the other day?

READER [*distressed*]. I oughtn't to have—it was only in the shock of your—

MANNOCK [*smiling*]. Yes, never mind all that. I should like to know, if you would like to tell me.

READER [*awkwardly, after a pause*]. She—we—we're going to have a baby.

MANNOCK. Ah! . . . The first?

[READER *nods.*] Frightened?

[READER *nods again.*]

READER [*suddenly*]. I—I do love her so.

MANNOCK [*gently*]. How long have you been married?

READER. Ten years. . . . It's like yesterday.

MANNOCK [*moved*]. Yes. . . .Oh, before I forget, I'd better write to Carfax. I know he wants somebody. [*He goes to his desk.*] Sit down, won't you?

READER. Thank you very much. It's very kind of you. You see, I haven't liked to tell her yet—

MANNOCK [*writing*]. Well, don't, until we've got this fixed up.

READER. No.

MANNOCK. I daresay Carfax will stand for another fifty, if he's sure he's getting the right man. Then that will be a pleasant surprise for her.

READER [*thawing*]. I am afraid she won't look at it quite like that. You see, she is — if I may say so — very much interested in you. In your career. She will be sorry to. . . . You see, we often talk about you in the evenings. We wonder what you are going to do. Having no career of our own, so to speak —

MANNOCK [*writing*]. No career of your own. Lucky man!

READER. We find our interest in following yours. I believe that if I could go home to-morrow and tell my wife — before it got into the papers, you understand — that you were to be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, she would be as happy and excited as if it had happened to me.

MANNOCK [*with a laugh for the vanity of these things*]. Chancellor of the Exchequer, eh? [*Shaking his head.*] No, Reader, no.

READER. Well, that's as may be. . . . [*Enthusiastically.*] To be Chancellor of the Exchequer! Think of the power it gives you! To know that there isn't a house in the whole country which isn't waiting for *your* decision — from the tiniest cottage to the hugest castle! Not a family that won't be affected! It must be wonderful. The power of affecting all those people! It has always seemed to me the supreme goal for any man to reach. [*Apologetically.*] Sometimes we have pretended — only in play, you understand — that it was I who had reached it . . . we have wondered . . . the power it gives you . . . [*He sees himself there,* ETHEL *with him.*] — we have talked over what we should do —

[*And* MANNOCK *has been seeing himself there too. Just for a moment he has been there.*]

MANNOCK [*with a sigh*]. Yes. . . . [*Then he is back with* SALLY *again. Gently he says.*] But there is something better than that. Something. . . . [*You can see him thinking of it, smiling. . . . But now his thoughts have changed; the smile gives place to a frown. The career is fighting its way back into his mind. Fighting with* SALLY. *He jerks his head round at* READER, READER *who is tempting him and says sharply.*] Chancellor of the Exchequer, eh? No, Reader, no. [*Returning to the letter.*] I sha'n't be a moment.

ACT III

SCENE 2. — *Cavendish Square.* MANNOCK'S *Library.*

[*It is afternoon, two days later.* MANNOCK *is alone, restlessly doing nothing.* ARTHUR *comes in.*]

ARTHUR. Busy?

MANNOCK [*looking up*]. No . . . no.

ARTHUR. Thought I'd say good-bye. I'm just off.

MANNOCK. Off?

ARTHUR. Yes, that's right, isn't it? You said you didn't want me till the end of the month.

MANNOCK [*remembering*]. Oh! . . . Oh, yes. [*He remembers that now he won't want* ARTHUR *at all.*] Yes. [*With an effort.*] What are you going to do?

ARTHUR. Going to Marjory's for a week. Then down to Cornwall for a little golf.

MANNOCK [*remembering his elder daughter*]. Marjory. . . . Yes.

[*How complicated life is!*]

ARTHUR. Any messages for any of them?

MANNOCK. Yes — no. I'll write. [*To himself.*] Yes, I shall have to write to Marjory.

ARTHUR. Right. Then if I'm back by the 30th, that will do?

MANNOCK [*after a silence*]. Arthur!

ARTHUR. Yes?

MANNOCK. I've sent in my resignation.

ARTHUR. Your resignation? Why? Oh, I see. The old resignation stunt. Hasn't that been rather overdone?

MANNOCK. You don't understand, Arthur—

ARTHUR. All these political tactics—there's something so tawdry about them, so shoddy, so— Sorry, Father, I was forgetting. I'm a neutral now. Well, I suppose I shall get used to them.

MANNOCK. I say again, I have resigned my seat in the Cabinet.

ARTHUR [*with a smile*]. If you're not careful, the P.M. will accept it, and then where will you be?

MANNOCK [*sharply*]. Out of the Cabinet, which is where I want to be.

ARTHUR. Not really? Why? [MANNOCK *shrugs his shoulders.*] No, but why, Father?

MANNOCK. I'm tired of it. I want to get out of it all.

ARTHUR [*eagerly*]. I say! You're not crossing over, are you? How terribly sporting of you!

MANNOCK [*firmly*]. I'm giving up politics altogether.

ARTHUR [*his jaw falling*]. Giving up—? Then what about me?

MANNOCK. That's been worrying me.

ARTHUR. Worrying you! I should think it had! You made me chuck a jolly good job to come to *you*, and then when it's been filled up by somebody else—

MANNOCK. Are you sure? I hoped that perhaps—

ARTHUR [*shaking his head gravely*]. I say, Father, this really is a bit steep.

MANNOCK [*humbly*]. I'm very sorry, Arthur. I'm to blame. I never ought to have persuaded you to come to me. It was your career to choose for yourself. I'm sorry.

ARTHUR [*still aggrieved*]. You practically ruin a man's life—

MANNOCK [*smiling sadly*]. Twenty-two, aren't you? No man's life is ruined at twenty-two. [*With sudden emotion.*] Oh, my God, to be twenty-two again!

ARTHUR. Well, but I mean—

MANNOCK. Arthur, forget all that I've said to you, will you, just for a week? Enjoy yourself at Marjory's, don't say anything to her about it, and I'll write to you. I can't talk about it now—not for another week. Will you do that for me?

ARTHUR [*reluctantly*]. Oh, all right. [*Looking thoughtfully at his father.*] You know, I believe it *is* a stunt, after all. A super-stunt. I don't know what the game is—

[*Enter* DIGBY.]

DIGBY. Mr. Eversley is here, sir.

MANNOCK. Yes, that's right, Digby. Show him in here.

ARTHUR [*to* DIGBY]. Is the car here?

DIGBY. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

ARTHUR. Then I'll be getting on. [*Holding out his hand.*] Good-bye, Father—and I'll wait for your letter.

MANNOCK. Yes. [*Taking his hand.*] Good-bye, Arthur. [*When will he see him again?*] Good-bye, old boy. Good luck to you always.

ARTHUR [*a little surprised*]. Thanks! [*He goes out.*]

[MANNOCK *walks up and down, thinking, thinking. How difficult it all is! . . . Then* DIGBY *announces* EVERSLEY.]

DIGBY. Mr. Eversley.

MANNOCK [*eagerly*]. I knew you would come. [*To* DIGBY, *who still waits.*] What is it? [DIGBY *presents a letter.*] Oh, put it down. [DIGBY *walks across to the writing-desk and places the letter there.*] Were you in London, or did I drag you up from the country? I had to see you.

[DIGBY *goes out.*]

EVERSLEY. Well, I *was* at home, but of course I was only too glad to come up, if you wanted me.

MANNOCK [*looking at him fondly*]. I never ought to have let you go, Teddy. I ought always to have kept you with me.

EVERSLEY [*happy at the* "TEDDY"]. And what should *I* have been doing all this time?

MANNOCK [*settling him in a chair*]. Nothing. Just admiring me. What else is a Squier for?

EVERSLEY. What else? The world is full of Nites and Squiers—the admired and the admiring. I wonder which are the happier?

MANNOCK [*gently*]. The loved and the loving.

EVERSLEY. Yes. Which are the happier, Dick?

MANNOCK [*suddenly, after a little silence*]. Got your pipe with you? [EVERSLEY *nods.*] Well, fill it then.

EVERSLEY [*taking it out*]. It is filled.

MANNOCK. Well, light it, then.

EVERSLEY [*lighting it*]. There! [*He smokes.*]

MANNOCK. Teddy, I'm giving it all up.

EVERSLEY. All what?

MANNOCK. Everything. Politics. My career. My successful career.

EVERSLEY [*smoking placidly*]. Any particular reason?

[MANNOCK *looks at him, and hesitates. Then he gives reasons — but not the particular reason.*]

MANNOCK. It's odd how wrapped up in my career I have been. I never saw it from the outside. I've been looking at it lately. I think it was you — that other night — who made me struggle outside and look at it. You were the first. That was the beginning of it.

EVERSLEY. I had no idea I was precipitating a political crisis. What did I say?

MANNOCK. You said, "And then success closed in on you."

EVERSLEY. Yes, I remember. But I apologized for it.

MANNOCK. It's a stifling thing, success. It shuts out so much. [*Gently.*] All the lovely things, all the precious things. . . . I've been looking back at my career. After all, he's in a position of trust, a Cabinet Minister. He is responsible for the happiness of the people, his fellow countrymen and women. How often have I thought of their happiness? How often of my personal triumph — my success? What are all our intrigues for, our strategy, our tactics? To improve the condition of England? Or to improve our personal position? I look back on my career, and never once can I say, "He did that for others."

EVERSLEY. The others are no better.

MANNOCK. That isn't a very proud thought for —

EVERSLEY. For a Dreadnought Nite?

MANNOCK. Don't! . . . Oh, my God, to be twenty-two again!

EVERSLEY. What would you do?

MANNOCK. Live. There is so much that I have missed. All the lovely things of life. But, perhaps, even now, it isn't too late.

EVERSLEY [*after smoking in silence for a little*]. And so you're giving it all up?

MANNOCK. Yes. This is between ourselves, of course, until it is made public.

EVERSLEY. Of course. . . . It's a big career to give up, as the world judges it.

MANNOCK [*a little vain of his sacrifice*]. I suppose it is.

EVERSLEY. They were talking politics in the train — as they always do — and one or two of them were saying that you ought to be the new Chancellor of the Exchequer.

MANNOCK [*pleased*]. Oh? Oh, but I shouldn't have been anyhow. Mowbray.

EVERSLEY. They didn't seem to think very much of Mowbray.

MANNOCK. He's the obvious man.

EVERSLEY. A little too obvious, they felt. . . .

MANNOCK [*after a pause*]. It was my one ambition in the old days.

EVERSLEY [*smiling*]. Not such very old days.

MANNOCK [*a little annoyed*]. You know what I mean. . . . I wanted to be that, even more than to be Prime Minister. It fascinated me.

EVERSLEY. It would terrify *me*.

MANNOCK. I think I've only realized lately how much I wanted it; how certain I was I could be one of the Great Ones. . . . It may never come now. [*Remembering suddenly.*] Well, of course *now* it never will — obviously. [*He sighs.*] I'm well out of it all. But even if — I mean Mowbray — well, he'll last this Government — and after the next Election, who knows?

[*He is thoughtful.*]

EVERSLEY. And what are you going to do when you retire?

MANNOCK. Teddy, you do think I'm right, don't you?

EVERSLEY. Well, I don't quite know all the circumstances, do I?

MANNOCK. I must have *you* on my side. Everybody here—well, naturally—

EVERSLEY. They think you're mad? They've sent for the doctor?

MANNOCK. They simply don't believe it. But *you*—you're not prejudiced—*you* think—?

EVERSLEY. Aren't I prejudiced?

MANNOCK. You?

EVERSLEY [*through clouds of smoke*]. I had a friend once. I lived with him, played with him, made plans with him, for—how many years? I was fond of him, Dick. I don't think he knew how fond we were of him, Sally and I; two of the admiring ones, the loving ones; yes, the happier ones. Then I lost him . . . and more than twenty years afterwards I found him again. And he was dead. Now you say that he is coming to life again, and you ask me to tell you—quite without prejudice—whether I should like him to come to life again. . . . It is a little difficult for me, Dick, to be quite unprejudiced.

MANNOCK [*remorsefully*]. Teddy!

EVERSLEY [*a little wistfully*]. But—I *should* like to find him again, you know. Just to talk to him about those—rather jolly days.

MANNOCK. They *were* good days.

EVERSLEY. Perhaps we didn't realize at the time how good they were.

MANNOCK. Do you remember—[*He breaks off impetuously.*] Oh, Teddy, there are a hundred things I want to talk to you about, a hundred things I want to tell you.

EVERSLEY. Well, that's why I came.

MANNOCK. I know. [*Suddenly.*] Teddy! I—[*And then he pulls himself up.*] No, I can't tell you now. Not here. I must see you—where can I see you? Not in this house. Where can I see you, where can we really talk?

EVERSLEY. Couldn't we dine together somewhere?

MANNOCK. Yes, that's it. Somewhere where we can be by ourselves. Now, let me think—

EVERSLEY. "The Cock," in Fleet Street? Not many people there in the evening.

MANNOCK. That will do. . . . I wonder what you'll think. . . . But I can't tell you here. . . . I'll call for you. Where are you staying? Your club?

EVERSLEY. I am staying with friends. At Porchester Terrace. But they don't expect me to dinner.

MANNOCK. Then I'll call for you at a quarter to eight. What number? You'd better write it down. [EVERSLEY *takes out a card.*] Got a pencil?

EVERSLEY [*feeling in his pockets*]. Somewhere.

MANNOCK [*going to the desk*]. Here you are.

[*And then he sees the letter and stops short.*]

EVERSLEY [*finding his own*]. It's all right. [*He writes the address.*]

[MANNOCK *gazes at the letter. This is from the Prime Minister—to accept his resignation. So his career is over. He stands there, letter in hand, breathing heavily as if he had been running.* EVERSLEY *looks at him in surprise.*]

MANNOCK. When did this—

EVERSLEY. What is it?

MANNOCK [*turning, letter in hand*]. How long—

EVERSLEY. Your butler brought it in, didn't he, when he brought *me* in?

MANNOCK. Yes, of course.

EVERSLEY. Don't mind me, Dick, if it's important.

MANNOCK. No, no, it's nothing. I—

[LADY JANE *comes in, followed by* BERTIE. *They are obviously excited.*]

LADY JANE [*eagerly*]. Richard! [*She sees* EVERSLEY.] Oh, I—[*coldly.*] Oh, how do you do, Mr. Eversley?

EVERSLEY. How do you do, Lady Jane? I was just going. [*He and* BERTIE *nod to each other.*] Well, good-bye, Dick. [*Giving him the card.*] Here's the address. And a quarter to eight?

MANNOCK [*mechanically*]. Yes, yes. Good-bye.

[*He rings the bell, and puts down the card.*]

EVERSLEY [*to* LADY JANE]. Good-bye. [*To* BERTIE.] Good-bye. [BERTIE *nods.*]

LADY JANE [*with an effort*]. Oh, but we mustn't drive you away like this.

EVERSLEY [*smiling pleasantly*]. But I really was going. Good-bye.

LADY JANE. Good-bye.

[DIGBY *is there to show him out. He goes.*]

[*All this time* MANNOCK *has been standing with the unopened letter in his hands, fingering the envelope.*]

LADY JANE [*in suppressed excitement.*] Richard! Bertie says. . . . Why, what's that? [*She is looking at the letter.*] But that's — why don't you open it? That's the letter. Open it! Open it!

MANNOCK [*dully*]. This is just acknowledging and accepting my resignation.

LADY JANE. But have you opened it yet? [*She snatches it from him, looks at it, and gives it back to him.*] But you haven't opened it yet! Open it! Bertie says —

BERTIE. The omens are distinctly favorable. But — well, now we shall know.

MANNOCK [*opening it*]. It's only just to accept my resignation.

[*He reads. You can see at once that it is not that.*]

LADY JANE [*watching his face*]. It is! [MANNOCK *looks in front of him, seeing visions*]. May I — [*She takes the letter from him.*] I must. [*She reads.*] Oh, well done, Richard!

[MANNOCK *stands there, breathing heavily. To be Chancellor of the Exchequer!*]

BERTIE. He has? [*She nods.*] By Jove! Congratulations!

LADY JANE. I never thought —

BERTIE. Well, I don't know. Mowbray has a good deal against him one way and another.

LADY JANE. Yes. But I was almost afraid to hope.

BERTIE [*proudly*]. Didn't I tell you to leave it to him?

[*He nods towards* MANNOCK.]

LADY JANE. Yes, you were quite right, Bertie.

[*She looks admiringly at her husband.*]

BERTIE. Of course, I know all about the resignation stunt — it's as old as the hills. But if you can do it with conviction, you can still pull it off sometimes.

LADY JANE. Yes, yes.

BERTIE. Mannock carried conviction — that's where he's such an artist. The P.M. really thought he was going. Didn't dare to lose him. Prepared to offer anything to keep him.

LADY JANE. Yes.

BERTIE. I've always said that, in the matter of political strategy, Mannock can give them all points. Even the P.M. I knew he'd pull it off.

LADY JANE. Richard!

[*She means "Come and talk to us."*]

MANNOCK [*his control suddenly giving way*]. So you knew I'd pull it off!

[*He is almost shouting.*]

BERTIE. Rather!

MANNOCK. I can give 'em all points in political strategy?

BERTIE. I've always said so.

MANNOCK. And I carry conviction — eh? — that's where I'm such an artist.

BERTIE. Exactly. [MANNOCK *gives a loud, bitter laugh.*] Well, I mean —

MANNOCK [*half hysterically*]. An artist! That's what I am. Carry conviction! I carried conviction all right. I pulled *your* leg pretty well, Bertie. [*To* LADY JANE.] *And* yours. You thought I meant to resign — yes, you did, both of you — you thought I meant it — you were frightened to death, yes, you were. You thought I really meant to give it all up. So did Arthur. I had Arthur in here just now — frightened to death — thought I meant to give it all up — talked about *his* career — his career! — my God! — frightened to death he was, just like you two. Ha! I pulled your legs pretty well. Resign? Why the devil should I resign? Haven't I got what I always wanted? You ask

Reader—he'll tell you—the supreme goal for any man to reach. Chancellor of the Exchequer—*that* gives you power. Me! I've done it! Just pure strategy. Pretending I wanted to give up politics. Why should I? Success—it closes in on you! My God, there's nothing I can't do! Nothing!

[*His voice rises almost to a shriek, as he drops into a chair, and sits there, his hands over his face, his shoulders shaking with long, tearless sobs.*]

BERTIE [*soothingly*]. I say, old fellow—

LADY JANE [*quietly*]. No, go Bertie.

BERTIE. Oh, right. [*Going.*] I'll come in this evening if I can. He'll be all right? [*She nods.*] Right.

[*He goes out.*]

LADY JANE [*putting an arm calmly on* MANNOCK'S *shoulders*]. It's all right now, Richard. I know how you must feel. It has been a very anxious time for both of us. But it's all over now. You've got what you wanted. I'm proud of you, very proud of you.

MANNOCK [*pulling himself together*]. I'm sorry. I—

LADY JANE [*calmly*]. It's all right. I understand perfectly. The strain—naturally.

MANNOCK. Yes.

LADY JANE. I'll leave you now. You'll want to be alone. But come and talk to me afterwards.

MANNOCK [*nodding*]. Yes.

LADY JANE [*giving him the letter*]. You'll want to answer this.

MANNOCK. Yes. Thank you.

LADY JANE [*looking at him admiringly*]. I'm very proud of you, Richard.

[*She goes out.*]

[*Alone,* MANNOCK *walks slowly to his desk, a tired man. There, he sees* EVERSLEY'S *card, picks it up, looks at it, puts it down, and takes up the telephone.*]

MANNOCK [*at the telephone*]. Hullo! Come in, will you? [*He goes back to his chair and waits.* READER *comes in, note-book in hand.*] I want a telegram sent at once. To Mr. Eversley. You'll find a card on my desk. [*Reader goes there.*] Got it? With an address in Porchester Terrace.

READER. Yes, sir.

[*He writes down the name and address and waits.*]

MANNOCK. "Afraid cannot dine to-night."

READER [*writing*]. "Afraid cannot dine to-night."

MANNOCK. That's all.

READER. Signed?

MANNOCK. Yes, "Dick." . . . [*An end to this weakness. He corrects himself firmly.*] No—Mannock.

READER. "Afraid cannot dine to-night. Mannock." . . . Anything else, sir?

MANNOCK. No. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . [*Reader waits.*] Another telegram.

READER [*waiting*]. Yes?

MANNOCK. Lady Carchester, Enderways, Riley, Yorkshire.

READER [*murmuring to himself*]. Enderways, Riley, R-I-L-E-Y?

MANNOCK. Yes.

READER. Yorkshire. [*He waits.*]

MANNOCK [*after a long pause*]. "I beg your pardon." [READER *says nothing.* MANNOCK *looks up.*] That's all.

READER. Oh, I beg—I see—I didn't understand. [*Writing.*] "I beg your pardon."

MANNOCK. We had a—a discussion. I—I was wrong. I have found out since that I was wrong. This is—[*he shrugs*].

READER [*pleasantly*]. A very graceful way of saying so, if I may be allowed—

MANNOCK [*to himself*]. Graceful!

READER [*after waiting*]. Signed? Or will she understand?

MANNOCK. She will understand. [*To himself, ashamed.*] I think she will understand. . . . All right, Reader.

[READER *goes out.*]

[MANNOCK *walks slowly to his desk. For a little while he sits there, holding the letter in his hand. . . .*]

[SALLY *is dead. He has killed her. No good explaining, apologizing, whining, to a person whom you have*

killed. Let him be man enough to spare her that last insult. No, there's nothing to say. It was EVERSLEY *and that damned tune that got into a man's head, and made him dream. . . . The sweetness of her in his dream! But that was twenty-five years ago. They're dead now; both dead. . . . But — Chancellor of the Exchequer! It will be in all the papers to-morrow. Chancellor of the Exchequer! What will the papers say? What will people say? Everybody will see it. . . .* SALLY *will see it. Will know, will understand. No, there's nothing to be said. That damned tune, that damned dream. O* SALLY, SALLY, SALLY! *Don't! Don't come into my dreams again. . . .*]

[*So for a little he sits, thinking. Then, with a bitter, contemptuous laugh, he tosses away his thoughts and comes back to the letter. Chancellor of the Exchequer! Briskly he dips his pen into the ink, and writes to the Prime Minister.*]

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St. John Alcock, *The Living Age*, Vol. 328, pages 197-202 (January 23, 1926). Account of Milne's life; criticism of his plays and poetry.

Other plays of similar character:

The Twelve Pound Look (J. M. Barrie)
Marco Millions (Eugene O'Neill)
To the Ladies! (George S. Kaufman)

QUESTIONS ON "SUCCESS"

1. Contrast *Success* with *A Woman of No Importance* as high comedies.
2. Is the dream scene successful? Why does Milne have both Nite and Mannock in the same scene?
3. Do you note any change in Arthur as the play progresses?
4. Is the title well chosen?
5. Would Mannock and Lady Carchester have been happy together?
6. Does the play end honestly?

SEAN O'CASEY

Concurrent with the development of the modern drama in England and the United States and on the Continent has arisen the new Irish drama, which is a part of the great artistic and æsthetic revival that swept over Ireland during the opening years of the twentieth century. The deliberate attempt to revive the older Irish culture and develop an indigenous literature is but one manifestation of a growing spirit of nationality which has resulted in genuine political and economic improvement. In poetry and drama the Celtic Renaissance has achieved its finest literary fruit. No nation today can boast of a greater list of literary men than can Ireland. John Millington Synge, Lord Dunsany, St. John Ervine, William Butler Yeats, George William Russell, Lady Gregory, George Moore, Padraic Colum, Lennox Robinson, and Sean O'Casey have lifted Ireland to an enviable position of literary importance.

The Irish National Theatre was founded in 1901 by Lady Gregory and Yeats with the purpose of exploiting the native Irish life and folk in plays of high literary quality. The Abbey Theatre in Dublin has become a world drama center comparable with the Moscow Art Theatre and the New York Theatre Guild. The movement succeeded beyond all expectations. Romantic and colorful Ireland and Irish people lent themselves admirably to the purpose of the enthusiastic dramatists with the result that Ireland achieved in two decades a dramatic literature superior to the entire product of the centuries before. The one act plays of Lady Gregory dealing with folk-history and contemporary life, the brilliant comedies and somber tragedies of Synge, the romances of Yeats, the fantasies of Lord Dunsany, and the plays of tenement life in Dublin by O'Casey are a distinctive contribution to modern drama.

In the British *Who's Who* for 1927 is the following cryptic entry concerning Sean (pronounced "Shane") O'Casey: "*b.* Dublin. *Educ.* in the streets of Dublin. Worked as a builder's labourer, railway labourer, and general labourer. *Publications:* Two Plays, The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock; The Plough and the Stars. *Recreations:* everything except work. *Address:* The Abbey Theatre, Dublin." Sean O'Casey was born and brought up in a Dublin tenement like those that figure in his plays, and has a sentimental concern for the suffering of the poor. Although he received no formal schooling (he taught himself to read at the age of fourteen), the streets of Dublin did not unaided educate him, for he has read widely and shows a thorough acquaintance with the works of Hardy, Anatole France, Balzac, Shaw, Shakespeare, and other masters. While a dock laborer he participated in the great strikes of 1913. In 1916 he was a member of the Citizens' army, a bellicose organization of young Dubliners, the first to arm for insurrection. When *Juno and the Paycock* was produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1924 O'Casey was a janitor in a workingmen's club. No one was more surprised than he at the success of his play, or at his receiving the Hawthornden Prize for the best work of imaginative literature for the year.

As had happened years before when Sygne's *Playboy of the Western World* was presented at the Abbey Theatre, there was a riot in the playhouse when, in 1926, *The Plough and the Stars* was performed. The Irish audience considered the piece offensive to national feeling and accused O'Casey of giving a distorted view of Irish life. There was some murmuring against *Juno and the Paycock*,

but the first audiences accepted the play as a comedy and were indifferent towards the deeper implications. "Ireland is the eternal Pagliacci at whose antics the world laughs while the clown heart breaks," wrote Joseph Wood Krutch in speaking of the farcical surfaces and tragic undertones of the play. To many the play suffers because of a too generous mixing of farce, comedy, and tragedy. American audiences also felt somewhat puzzled by a lack of uniformity of purpose and by the sketchy, formless character of the play.

O'Casey has done for the tenement dweller of the city what Synge and Lady Gregory have done for the Irish peasant and country-side; there is a folk-life in the city as well as in the country. As in all the Irish plays the language of *Juno and the Paycock* is rich and full flavored, and although there are long stretches of dialogue and infrequent action, the beauty and poetry of "word poems" (as O'Casey calls his speeches) are sufficient compensation. Perhaps Eugene O'Neill, especially the O'Neill of the earlier plays, is most like O'Casey of all his contemporaries. Both find dramatic material in the "lower depths" of society. Both are concerned with the sufferings of people and not with social problems, or with issues of national, economic, or moral interest. Many critics compare O'Casey with the Russians, particularly Chekov, but there is too much Celtic gaiety in his temperament to warrant too rigorous a comparison with either O'Neill or the Russian dramatists.

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
(1924)

BY

SEAN O'CASEY

CHARACTERS

"Captain" Jack Boyle
Juno Boyle, *his wife*
Johnny Boyle } *their children*
Mary Boyle }
"Joxer" Daly
Mrs. Maisie Madigan
"Needle" Nugent, *a tailor*
Mrs. Tancred
Jerry Devine
Residents in the Tenement

Charlie Bentham, *a school teacher*
An Irregular Mobilizer
Two Irregulars
A Coal-block Vendor
A Sewing Machine Man
Two Furniture Removal Men
Two Neighbors

Act I: The living apartment of a two-roomed tenancy of the Boyle family, in a tenement house in Dublin.
Act II: The Same.
Act III: The Same.

A few days elapse between Acts 1 and 2, and two months between Acts 2 and 3.

During Act 1 the curtain is lowered for a few minutes to denote the lapse of one hour.

Period of the play, 1922.

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JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK

ACT I

The living room of a two-room tenancy occupied by the Boyle *family in a tenement house in Dublin. Left, a door leading to another part of the house; left of door a window looking into the street; at back a dresser; farther to right at back, a window looking into the back of the house. Between the window and the dresser is a picture of the Virgin; below the picture, on a bracket, is a crimson bowl in which a floating votive light is burning. Farther to the right is a small bed partly concealed by cretonne hangings strung on a twine. To the right is the fireplace; near the fireplace is a door leading to the other room. Beside the fireplace is a box containing coal. On the mantelshelf is an alarm clock lying on its face. In a corner near the window looking into the back is a galvanized bath. A table and some chairs. On the table are breakfast things for one. A teapot is on the hob and a frying-pan stands inside the fender. There are a few books on the dresser and one on the table. Leaning against the dresser is a long-handled shovel — the kind invariably used by laborers when turning concrete or mixing mortar.* Johnny Boyle *is sitting crouched beside the fire.* Mary *with her jumper off — it is lying on the back of a chair — is arranging her hair before a tiny mirror perched on the table. Beside the mirror is stretched out the morning paper, which she looks at when she isn't gazing into the mirror. She is a well-made and good-looking girl of twenty-two. Two forces are working in her mind — one, through the circumstances of her life, pulling her back; the other, through the influence of books she has read, pushing her forward. The opposing forces are apparent in her speech and her manners, both of which are degraded by her environment, and improved by her acquaintance — slight though it be — with literature. The time is early forenoon.*

Mary [*looking at the paper*]. On a little bye-road, out beyant Finglas, he was found.

[Mrs. Boyle *enters by door on right; she has been shopping and carries a small parcel in her hand. She is forty-five years of age, and twenty years ago she must have been a pretty woman; but her face has now assumed that look which ultimately settles down upon the faces of the women of the working-class: a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blending with an expression of mechanical resistance. Were circumstances favorable, she would probably be a handsome, active and clever woman.*]

Mrs. Boyle. Isn't he come in yet?

Mary. No, mother.

Mrs. Boyle. Oh, he'll come in when he likes; struttin' about the town like a paycock with Joxer, I suppose. I hear all about Mrs. Tancred's son is in this mornin's paper.

Mary. The full details are in it this mornin'; seven wounds he had — one entherin' the neck, with an exit wound beneath the left shoulder-blade; another in the left breast penethratin' the heart, an' . . .

JOHNNY [*springing up from the fire*]. Oh, quit that readin', for God's sake! Are yous losin' all your feelin's? It'll soon be that none of yous'll read anythin' that's not about butcherin'!

[*He goes quickly into the room on left.*]

MARY. He's gettin' very sensitive, all of a sudden!

MRS. BOYLE. I'll read it myself, Mary, by an' by, when I come home. Everybody's sayin' that he was a die-hard — thanks be to God that Johnny had nothin' to do with him this long time. . . . [*Opening the parcel and taking out some sausages, which she places on a plate.*] Ah, then, if that father o' yours doesn't come in soon for his breakfast, he may go without any; I'll not wait much longer for him.

MARY Can't you let him get it himself when he comes in?

MRS. BOYLE. Yes, an' let him bring in Joxer Daly along with him? Ay, that's what he'd like, an' that's what he's waitin' for — till he thinks I'm gone to work, an' then sail in with the boul' Joxer, to burn all the coal an' dhrink all the tay in the place, to show them what a good Samaritan he is! But I'll stop here till he comes in, if I have to wait till to-morrow mornin'.

VOICE OF JOHNNY. Mother!

MRS. BOYLE. Yis?

VOICE OF JOHNNY. Bring us in a dhrink o' wather.

MRS. BOYLE. Bring in that fella a dhrink o' wather, for God's sake, Mary.

MARY. Isn't he big an' able enough to come out an' get it himself?

MRS. BOYLE. If you weren't well yourself you'd like somebody to bring you in a dhrink o' wather.

[*She brings in drink and returns.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Isn't it terrible to have to be waitin' this way! You'd think he was bringin' twenty poun's a week into the house the way he's going on. He wore out the Health Insurance long ago, he's afther wearin' out the unemployment dole, an', now, he's thryin' to wear out me! An' constantly singin', no less, when he ought always to be on his knees offerin' up a Novena for a job!

MARY [*tying a ribbon, fillet-wise around her head*]. I don't like this ribbon, ma; I think I'll wear the green — it looks betther than the blue.

MRS. BOYLE. Ah, wear whatever ribbon you like, girl, only don't be botherin' me. I don't know what a girl on strike wants to be wearin' a ribbon round her head for or silk stockin's on her legs either; it's wearin' them things that make the employers think they're givin' yous too much money.

MARY. The hour is past now when we'll ask the employers' permission to wear what we like.

MRS. BOYLE. I don't know why you wanted to walk out for Jennie Claffey; up to this you never had a good word for her.

MARY. What's the use of belongin' to a Trades Union if you won't stand up for your principles? Why did they sack her? It was a clear case of victimization. We couldn't let her walk the streets, could we?

MRS. BOYLE. No, of course yous couldn't — yous wanted to keep her company. Wan victim wasn't enough. When the employers sacrifice wan victim, the Trades Unions go wan betther be sacrificin' a hundred.

MARY. It doesn't matter what you say, ma — a principle's a principle.

MRS. BOYLE. Yis; an' when I go into oul' Murphy's to-morrow, an' he gets to know that, instead o' payin' all, I'm goin' to borry more, what'll he say when I tell him a principle's a principle? What'll we do if he refuses to give us any more on tick?

MARY. He daren't refuse — if he does, can't you tell him he's paid?

MRS. BOYLE. It's lookin' as if he was paid, whether he refuses or no.

[JOHNNY *appears at the door on the left. He can be plainly seen now; he is a thin delicate fellow, something younger than* MARY. *He has evidently gone through a rough time. His face is pale and drawn; there is a tremulous look of indefi-*

nite fear in his eyes. The left sleeve of his coat is empty, and he walks with a slight halt.]

JOHNNY. I was lyin' down; I thought yous were gone. Oul' Simon Mackay is thrampin' about like a horse over me head, an' I can't sleep with him—they're like thunder-claps in me brain! The curse o'—God forgive me for goin' to curse!

MRS. BOYLE. There, now; go back an' lie down aga'n, an' I'll bring you in a nice cup o' tay.

JOHNNY. Tay, tay, tay! You're always thinkin' of tay. If a man was dyin', you'd thry to make him swally a cup o' tay! [*He goes back.*]

MRS. BOYLE. I don't know what's goin' to be done with him. The bullet he got in the hip in Easter Week was bad enough, but the bomb that shatthered his arm in the fight in O'Connell Street put the finishin' touch on him. I knew he was makin' a fool of himself. God knows I went down on me bended knees to him not to go agen the Free State.

MARY. He stuck to his principles, an', no matter how you may argue, ma, a principle's a principle.

VOICE OF JOHNNY. Is Mary goin' to stay here?

MARY. No, I'm not goin' to stay here; you can't expect me to be always at your beck an' call, can you?

VOICE OF JOHNNY. I won't stop here be meself!

MRS. BOYLE. Amn't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' yous! I don't know what any o' yous ud do without your ma. [*To* JOHNNY.] Your father'll be here in a minute, an' if you want anythin', he'll get it for you.

JOHNNY. I hate assin' him for anythin'. . . . He hates to be asked to stir. . . . Is the light lightin' before the picture o' the Virgin?

MRS. BOYLE. Yis, yis! The wan inside to St. Anthony isn't enough, but he must have another wan to the Virgin here!

[JERRY DEVINE *enters hastily. He is about twenty-five, well set, active and earnest. He is a type, becoming very common now in the Labor Movement, of a mind knowing enough to make the mass of his associates, who know less, a power, and too little to broaden that power for the benefit of all.* MARY *seizes her jumper and runs hastily into room left.*]

JERRY [*breathless*]. Where's the Captain, Mrs. Boyle; where's the Captain?

MRS. BOYLE. You may well ass a body that: he's wherever Joxer Daly is—dhrinkin' in some snug or another.

JERRY. Father Farrell is just afther stoppin' to tell me to run up an' get him to go to the new job that's goin' on in Rathmines; his cousin is foreman o' the job, an' Father Farrell was speakin' to him about poor Johnny an' his father bein' idle so long, an' the foreman told Father Farrell to send the Captain up an' he'd give him a start—I wondher where I'd find him?

MRS. BOYLE. You'll find he's ayther in Ryan's or Foley's.

JERRY. I'll run round to Ryan's—I know it's a great house o' Joxer's. [*He rushes out.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*piteously*]. There now he'll miss that job, or I know for what! If he gets win' o' the word, he'll not come back till evenin', so that it'll be too late. There'll never be any good got out o' him so long as he goes with that shouldher-shruggin' Joxer. I killin' meself workin', and he sthruttin' about from mornin' till night like a paycock!

[*The steps of two persons are heard coming up a flight of stairs. They are the footsteps of* CAPTAIN BOYLE *and* JOXER. CAPTAIN BOYLE *is singing a deep, sonorous, self-honoring voice.*]

THE CAPTAIN. Sweet Spirit, hear me prayer! Hear . . . oh . . . hear . . . me prayer . . . hear, oh, hear . . . Oh, he . . . ar . . . oh, he . . . ar . . . me . . . pray . . . er!

JOXER [*outside*]. Ah, that's a darlin' song, a daaarlin' song!

MRS. BOYLE [*viciously*]. Sweet spirit

hear his prayer! Ah, then, I'll take me solemn affeydavey, it's not for a job he's prayin'!

[*She sits down on the bed so that the cretonne hangings hide her from the view of those entering.*]

[THE CAPTAIN *comes slowly in. He is a man of about sixty; stout, grey-haired and stocky. His neck is short, and his head looks like a stone ball that one sometimes sees on top of a gate-post. His cheeks, reddish-purple, are puffed out, as if he were always repressing an almost irrepressible ejaculation. On his upper lip is a crisp, tightly cropped moustache; he carries himself with the upper part of his body slightly thrown back, and his stomach slightly thrust forward. His walk is a slow, consequential strut. His clothes are dingy, and he wears a faded seaman's cap with a glazed peak.*]

BOYLE [*to* JOXER, *who is still outside*]. Come on, come on in, Joxer; she's gone out long ago, man. If there's nothing else to be got, we'll furrage out a cup o' tay, anyway. It's the only bit I get in comfort when she's away. 'Tisn't Juno should be her pet name at all, but Deirdre of the Sorras, for she's always grousin'.

[JOXER *steps cautiously into the room. He may be younger than* THE CAPTAIN *but he looks a lot older. His face is like a bundle of crinkled paper; his eyes have a cunning twinkle; he is spare and loosely built; he has a habit of constantly shrugging his shoulders with a peculiar twitching movement, meant to be ingratiating. His face is invariably ornamented with a grin.*]

JOXER. It's a terrible thing to be tied to a woman that's always grousin'. I don't know how you stick it — it ud put years on me. It's a good job she has to be so ofen away, for [*with a shrug*] when the cat's away, the mice can play!

BOYLE [*with a commanding and complacent gesture*]. Pull over to the fire, Joxer, an' we'll have a cup o' tay in a minute.

JOXER. Ah, a cup o' tay's a darlin' thing, a daaarlin' thin — the cup that cheers but doesn't. . . .

[JOXER'S *rhapsody is cut short by the sight of* JUNO *coming forward and confronting the two cronies. Both are stupefied.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*with sweet irony — poking the fire, and turning her head to glare at* JOXER]. Pull over to the fire, Joxer Daly, an' we'll have a cup o' tay in a minute! Are you sure, now, you wouldn't like an egg?

JOXER. I can't stop, Mrs. Boyle; I'm in a desperate hurry, a desperate hurry.

MRS. BOYLE. Pull over to the fire, Joxer Daly; people is always far more comfortabler here than they are in their own place.

[JOXER *makes hastily for the door.* BOYLE *stirs to follow him; thinks of something to relieve the situation — stops, and says suddenly*]: Joxer!

JOXER [*at door ready to bolt*]. Yis?

BOYLE. You know the foreman o' that job that's goin' on down in Killesther, don't you, Joxer?

JOXER [*puzzled*]. Foreman — Killesther?

BOYLE [*with a meaning look*]. He's a butty of yours, isn't he?

JOXER [*the truth dawning on him*]. The foreman at Killesther — oh yis, yis. He's an oul' butty o' mine — oh, he's a darlin' man, a daarlin' man.

BOYLE. Oh, then, it's a sure thing. It's a pity we didn't go down at breakfast first thing this mornin' — we might ha' been working now; but you didn't know it then.

JOXER [*with a shrug*]. It's betther late than never.

BOYLE. It's nearly time we got a start, anyhow; I'm fed up knockin' round, doin' nothin'. He promised you — gave you the straight tip?

JOXER. Yis. "Come down on the blow o' dinner," says he, "an' I'll start you, an' any friend you like to brin' with

you." Ah, says I, you're a darlin' man, a daaarlin' man.

BOYLE. Well, it couldn't come at a betther time — we're a long time waitin' for it.

JOXER. Indeed we were; but it's a long lane that has no turnin'.

BOYLE. The blow up for dinner is at one — wait till I see what time 'tis. [*He goes over to the mantelpiece, and gingerly lifts the clock.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Min' now, how you go on fiddlin' with that clock — you know the least little thing sets is asthray.

BOYLE. The job couldn't come at a betther time; I'm feelin' in great fettle, Joxer. I'd hardly believe I ever had a pain in me legs, an' last week I was nearly crippled with them.

JOXER. That's betther an' betther; ah, God never shut wan door but he opened another!

BOYLE. It's only eleven o'clock; we've lashins o' time. I'll slip on me oul' moleskins afther breakfast, an' we can saunther down at our ayse. [*Putting his hand on the shovel*]. I think, Joxer, we'd betther bring our shovels?

JOXER. Yis, Captain, yis; it's betther to go fully prepared an' ready for all eventualities. You bring your long-tailed shovel, an' I'll bring me navvy. We mighten' want them, an', then agen, we might: for want of a nail the shoe was last, for want of a shoe the horse was lost, an' for the want of a horse the man was lost — aw, that's a darlin' proverb, a daarlin'. . . .

[*As* JOXER *is finishing his sentence,* MRS. BOYLE *approaches the door and* JOXER *retreats hurriedly. She shuts the door with a bang.*]

BOYLE [*suggestively*]. We won't be long pullin' ourselves together agen when I'm working for a few weeks.

[MRS. BOYLE *takes no notice.*]

BOYLE. The foreman on the job is an oul' butty o' Joxer's; I have an idea that I know him meself. [*Silence.*] . . . There's a button off the back o' me moleskin trousers. . . . If you leave out a needle an' thread I'll sew it on meself. . . Thanks be to God, the pains in me legs is gone, anyhow!

MRS. BOYLE [*with a burst*]. Look here, Mr. Jack Boyle, them yarns won't go down with Juno. I know you an' Joxer Daly of an oul' date, an', if you think you're able to come it over me with them fairy tales, you're in the wrong shop.

BOYLE [*coughing subduedly to relieve the tenseness of the situation*]. U-u-u-ugh.

MRS. BOYLE. Butty o' Joxer's! Oh, you'll do a lot o' good as long as you continue to be a butty o' Joxer's!

BOYLE. U-u-u-ugh.

MRS. BOYLE. Shovel! Ah, then, me boyo, you'd do far more work with a knife an' fork than ever you'll do with a shovel! If there was e'er a genuine job goin' you'd be dh'other way about — not able to lift your arms with the pains in your legs. Your poor wife slavin' to keep the bit in your mouth, an' you gallivantin' about all the day like a paycock!

BOYLE. It ud be betther for a man to be dead, betther for a man to be dead.

MRS. BOYLE [*ignoring the interruption*]. Everybody callin' you "Captain," an' you only wanst on the wather, in an oul' collier from here to Liverpool, when anybody, to listen or look at you, ud take you for a second Christo For Columbus!

BOYLE. Are you never goin' to give us a rest?

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, you're never tired o' looking for a rest.

BOYLE. D'ye want to dhrive me out o' the house?

MRS. BOYLE. It ud be easier to dhrive you out o' the house than to dhrive you into a job. Here, sit down an' take your breakfast — it may be the last you'll get, for I don't know where the next is goin' to come from.

BOYLE. If I get this job we'll be all right.

MRS. BOYLE. Did ye see Jerry Devine?

BOYLE [*testily*]. No, I didn't see him.

MRS. BOYLE. No, but you seen Joxer. Well, he was here lookin' for you.

BOYLE. Well, let him look!

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, indeed, he may well look, for it ud be hard for him to see you, an' you stuck in Ryan's snug.

BOYLE. I wasn't in Ryan's snug — I don't go into Ryan's.

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, is there a mad dog there? Well, if you weren't in Ryan's you were in Foley's.

BOYLE. I'm telling you for the last three weeks I haven't tasted a dhrop of intoxicatin' liquor. I wasn't in ayther wan snug or dh'other — I could swear that on a prayer-book — I'm as innocent as the child unborn!

MRS. BOYLE. Well, if you'd been in for your breakfast you'd ha' seen him.

BOYLE [*suspiciously*]. What does he want me for?

MRS. BOYLE. He'll be back any minute an' then you'll soon know.

BOYLE. I'll dhrop out an' see if I can meet him.

MRS. BOYLE. You'll sit down an' take your breakfast, an' let me go to me work, for I'm an hour late already waitin' for you.

BOYLE. You needn't ha' waited, for I'll take no breakfast — I've a little spirit left in me still!

MRS. BOYLE. Are you goin' to have your breakfast — yes or no?

BOYLE [*too proud to yield*]. I'll have no breakfast — yous can keep your breakfast. [*Plaintively.*] I'll knock out a bit somewhere, never fear.

MRS. BOYLE. Nobody's goin' to coax you — don't think that.

[*She vigorously replaces the pan and the sausages in the press.*]

BOYLE. I've a little spirit left in me still.

[JERRY DEVINE *enters hastily.*]

JERRY. Oh, here you are at last! I've been searchin' for you everywhere. The foreman in Foley's told me you hadn't left the snug with Joxer ten minutes before I went in.

MRS. BOYLE. An' he swearin' on the holy prayer-book that he wasn't in no snug!

BOYLE [*to* JERRY]. What business is it o' yours whether I was in a snug or no? What do you want to be gallopin' about afther me for? Is a man not to be allowed to leave his house for a minute without havin' a pack o' spies, pimps an' informers cantherin' at his heels?

JERRY. Oh, you're takin' a wrong view of it, Mr. Boyle; I was simply anxious to do you a good turn. I have a message for you from Father Farrell: he says that if you go to the job that's on in Rathmines, an' ask for Foreman Mangan, you'll get a start.

BOYLE. That's all right, but I don't want the motions of me body to be watched the way an asthronomer ud watch a star. If you're folleyin' Mary aself, you've no pereeogative to be folleyin' me. [*Suddenly catching his thigh.*] U-ugh, I'm afther gettin' a terrible twinge in me right leg!

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, it won't be very long now till it travels into your left wan. It's miraculous that whenever he scents a job in front of him, his legs begin to fail him! Then, me bucko, if you lose this chance, you may go an' furrage for yourself!

JERRY. This job'll last for some time too, Captain, an' as soon as the foundations are in, it'll be cushy enough.

BOYLE. Won't it be a climbin' job? How d'ye expect me to be able to go up a ladder with these legs? An', if I get up aself, how am I goin' to get down agen?

MRS. BOYLE [*viciously*]. Get wan o' the laborers to carry you down in a hod! You can't climb a laddher, but you can skip like a goat into a snug!

JERRY. I wouldn't let meself be let down that easy, Mr. Boyle; a little exercise, now, might do you all the good in the world.

BOYLE. It's a docthor you should have been, Devine — maybe you know more about the pains in me legs than meself that has them?

JERRY [*irritated*]. Oh, I know nothin' about the pains in your legs; I've brought the message that Father Farrell gave me, an' that's all I can do.

MRS. BOYLE. Here, sit down an' take your breakfast, an' go an' get ready;

an' don't be actin' as if you couldn't pull a wing out of a dead bee.

BOYLE. I want no breakfast, I tell you; it ud choke me afther all that's been said. I've a little spirit left in me still.

MRS. BOYLE. Well, let's see your spirit, then, an' go in at wanst an' put on your moleskin trousers!

BOYLE [*moving towards the door on left*]. It ud be betther for a man to be dead! U-ugh! There's another twinge in me other leg! Nobody but meself knows the sufferin' I'm goin' through with the pains in these legs o' mine!

[*He goes into the room on left as* MARY *comes out with her hat in her hand.*]

MRS. BOYLE. I'll have to push off now, for I'm terrible late already, but I was determined to stay an' hunt that Joxer this time. [*She goes off.*]

JERRY. Are you going out, Mary?

MARY. It looks like it when I'm putting on my hat, doesn't it?

JERRY. The bitther word agen, Mary.

MARY. You won't allow me to be friendly with you; if I thry, you deliberately misundherstand it.

JERRY. I didn't always misundherstand it; you were often delighted to have the arms of Jerry around you.

MARY. If you go on talkin' like this, Jerry Devine, you'll make me hate you!

JERRY. Well, let it be either a weddin' or a wake! Listen, Mary, I'm standin' for the Secretaryship of our Union. There's only one opposin' me; I'm popular with all the men, an' a good speaker — all are sayin' that I'll get elected.

MARY. Well?

JERRY. The job's worth three hundred an' fifty pounds a year, Mary. You an' I could live nice an' cosily on that; it would lift you out o' this place an'. . . .

MARY. I haven't time to listen to you now — I have to go.

[*She is going out when* JERRY *bars the way.*]

JERRY [*appealingly*]. Mary, what's come over you with me for the last few weeks? You hardly speak to me, an' then only a word with a face o' bittherness on it. Have you forgotten, Mary, all the happy evenin's that were as sweet as the scented hawthorn that sheltered the sides o' the road as we saunthered through the country?

MARY. That's all over now. When you get your new job, Jerry, you won't be long findin' a girl far betther than I am for your sweetheart.

JERRY. Never, never, Mary! No matther what happens you'll always be the same to me.

MARY. I must be off; please let me go, Jerry.

JERRY. I'll go a bit o' the way with you.

MARY. You needn't, thanks; I want to be by meself.

JERRY [*catching her arm*]. You're goin' to meet another fella; you've clicked with some one else, me lady!

MARY. That's no concern o' yours, Jerry Devine; let me go!

JERRY. I saw yous comin' out o' the Cornflower Dance Class, an' you hangin' on his arm — a thin, lanky strip of a Micky Dazzler, with a walkin'-stick an' gloves!

VOICE OF JOHNNY [*loudly*]. What are you doin' there — pullin' about everything!

VOICE OF BOYLE [*loudly and viciously*]. I'm puttin' on me moleskin trousers!

MARY. You're hurtin' me arm! Let me go, or I'll scream, an' then you'll have the oul' fella out on top of us!

JERRY. Don't be so hard on a fella, Mary, don't be so hard.

BOYLE [*appearing at the door*]. What's the meanin' of all this hillabaloo?

MARY. Let me go, let me go!

BOYLE. D'ye hear me — what's all this hillabaloo about?

JERRY [*plaintively*]. Will you not give us one kind word, one kind word, Mary?

BOYLE. D'ye hear me talkin' to yous? What's all this hillabaloo for?

JERRY. Let me kiss your hand, your little, tiny, white hand!

BOYLE. Your little, tiny, white hand

—are you takin' leave o' your senses, man?

[MARY *breaks away and rushes out.*]

BOYLE. This is nice goin's on in front of her father!

JERRY. Ah, dhry up, for God's sake!

[*He follows* MARY.]

BOYLE. Chiselurs don't care a damn now about their parents, they're bringin' their fathers' grey hairs down with sorra to the grave, an' laughin' at it, laughin' at it. Ah, I suppose it's just the same everywhere—the whole worl's in a state o' chassis! [*He sits by the fire.*] Breakfast! Well, they can keep their breakfast for me. Not if they went down on their bended knees would I take it—I'll show them I've a little spirit left in me still! [*He goes over to the press, takes out a plate and looks at it.*] Sassige! Well, let her keep her sassige. [*He returns to the fire, takes up the teapot and gives it a gentle shake.*] The tea's wet right enough.

[*A pause; he rises, goes to the press, takes out the sausage, puts it on the pan, and puts both on the fire. He attends the sausage with a fork.*]

BOYLE [*singing*]:

When the robins nest agen,
And the flowers are in bloom,
When the Springtime's sunny smile
seems to banish all sorrow an'
gloom;
Then me bonny blue-ey'd lad, if me
heart be true till then—
He's promised he'll come back to me,
When the robins nest agen!

[*He lifts his head at the high note, and then drops his eyes to the pan.*]

BOYLE [*singing*]:

When the . . . .

[*Steps are heard approaching; he whips the pan off the fire and puts it under the bed, then sits down at the fire. The door opens and a bearded man looking in says*]:

You don't happen to want a sewin' machine?

BOYLE [*furiously*]. No, I don't want e'er a sewin' machine!

[*He returns the pan to the fire, and commences to sing again.*]

BOYLE [*singing*]:

When the robins nest agen,
And the flowers they are in bloom,
He's . . .

[*A thundering knock is heard at the street door.*]

BOYLE. There's a terrible tatheraraa—that's a stranger—that's nobody belongin' to the house.

[*Another loud knock.*]

JOXER [*sticking his head in at the door*]. Did ye hear them tatherarahs?

BOYLE. Well, Joxer, I'm not deaf.

JOHNNY [*appearing in his shirt and trousers at the door on left; his face is anxious and his voice is tremulous*]. Who's that at the door; who's that at the door? Who gave that knock—d'ye yous hear me—are yous deaf or dhrunk or what?

BOYLE [*to* JOHNNY]. How the hell do I know who 'tis? Joxer, stick your head out o' the window an' see.

JOXER. An' mebbe get a bullet in the kisser? Ah, none o' them thricks for Joxer! It's betther to be a coward than a corpse!

BOYLE [*looking cautiously out of the window*]. It's a fella in a thrench coat.

JOHNNY. Holy Mary, Mother o' God, I . . .

BOYLE. He's goin' away—he must ha' got tired knockin'.

[JOHNNY *returns to the room on left.*]

BOYLE. Sit down an' have a cup o' tay, Joxer.

JOXER. I'm afraid the missus ud pop in on us agen before we'd know where we are. Somethin's tellin' me to go at wanst.

BOYLE. Don't be superstitious, man; we're Dublin men, an' not boyos that's only afther comin' up from the bog o' Allen—though if she did come in, right enough, we'd be caught like rats in a thrap.

JOXER. An' you know the sort she is—she wouldn't listen to reason—an' wanse bitten twice shy.

BOYLE [*going over to the window at back*]. If the worst came to the worst,

you could dart out here, Joxer; it's only a dhrop of a few feet to the roof of the return room, an' the first minute she goes into dh'other room, I'll give you the bend, an' you can slip in an' away.

JOXER [*yielding to the temptation*]. Ah, I won't stop very long anyhow. [*Picking up a book from the table.*] Whose is the buk?

BOYLE. Aw, one o' Mary's; she's always readin' lately — nothin' but thrash, too. There's one I was lookin' at dh'other day: three stories, The Doll's House, Ghosts, an' The Wild Duck — buks only fit for chiselurs!

JOXER. Didja ever rade *Elizabeth, or Th' Exile o' Sibayria* . . . ah, it's a darlin' story, a daarlin' story!

BOYLE. You eat your sassige, an' never min' *Th' Exile o' Sibayria.*

[*Both sit down;* BOYLE *fills out tea, pours gravy on* JOXER'S *plate, and keeps the sausage for himself.*]

JOXER. What are you wearin' your moleskin trousers for?

BOYLE. I have to go to a job, Joxer. Just afther you'd gone, Devine kem runnin' in to tell us that Father Farrell said if I went down to the job that's goin' on in Rathmines I'd get a start.

JOXER. Be the holy, that's good news!

BOYLE. How is it good news? I wondher if you were in my condition, would you call it good news?

JOXER. I thought . . .

BOYLE. You thought! You think too sudden sometimes, Joxer. D'ye know, I'm hardly able to crawl with the pains in me legs!

JOXER. Yis, yis; I forgot the pains in your legs. I know you can do nothin' while they're at you.

BOYLE. You forgot; I don't think any of yous realize the state I'm in with the pains in me legs. What ud happen if I had to carry a bag o' cement?

JOXER. Ah, any man havin' the like of them pains id be down an' out, down an' out.

BOYLE. I wouldn't mind if he had said it to meself; but, no, oh no, he rushes in an' shouts it out in front o' Juno, an' you know what Juno is, Joxer. We all know Devine knows a little more than the rest of us, but he doesn't act as if he did; he's a good boy, sober, able to talk an' all that, but still . . .

JOXER. Oh ay; able to argufy, but still . . .

BOYLE. If he's runnin' afther Mary, aself, he's not goin' to be runnin' afther me. Captain Boyle's able to take care of himself. Afther all, I'm not gettin' brought up on Virol. I never heard him usin' a curse; I don't believe he was ever dhrunk in his life — sure he's not like a Christian at all!

JOXER. You're afther takin' the word out o' me mouth — afther all, a Christian's natural, but he's unnatural.

BOYLE. His oul' fella was just the same — a Wicklow man.

JOXER. A Wicklow man! That explains the whole thing. I've met many a Wicklow man in me time, but I never met wan that was any good.

BOYLE. "Father Farrell," says he, "sent me down to tell you." Father Farrell! . . . D'ye know, Joxer, I never like to be beholden to any o' the clergy.

JOXER. It's dangerous, right enough.

BOYLE. If they do anything for you, they'd want you to be livin' in the Chapel. . . . I'm goin' to tell you somethin', Joxer, that I wouldn't tell to anybody else — the clergy always had too much power over the people in this unfortunate country.

JOXER. You could sing that if you had an air to it!

BOYLE [*becoming enthusiastic*]. Didn't they prevent the people in '47 from seizin' the corn, an' they starvin'; didn't they down Parnell; didn't they say that hell wasn't hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish the Fenians? We don't forget, we don't forget them things, Joxer. If they've taken everything else from us, Joxer, they've left us our memory.

JOXER [*emotionally*]. For mem'ry's the only friend that grief can call its own, that grief . . . can . . . call . . . its own!

BOYLE. Father Farrell's beginnin' to take a great intherest in Captain Boyle; because of what Johnny did for his

country, says he to me wan day. It's a curious way to reward Johnny be makin' his poor oul' father work. But, that's what the clergy want, Joxer — work, work, work for me an' you; havin' us mulin' from mornin' till night, so that they may be in betther fettle when they come hoppin' round for their dues! Job! Well, let him give his job to wan of his hymn-singin', prayer-spoutin', craw-thumpin' Confraternity men!

[*The voice of a coal-block vendor is heard chanting in the street.*]

Voice of Coal Vendor. Blocks . . . coal-blocks! Blocks . . . coal-blocks!

Joxer. God be with the young days when you were steppin' the deck of a manly ship, with the win' blowin' a hurricane through the masts, an' the only sound you'd hear was, "Port your helm!" an' the only answer, "Port it is, sir!"

Boyle. Them was days, Joxer, them was days. Nothin' was too hot or too heavy for me then. Sailin' from the Gulf o' Mexico to the Antanartic Ocean. I seen things, I seen things, Joxer, that no mortal man should speak about that knows his Catechism. Ofen, an' ofen, when I was fixed to the wheel with a marlinspike, an' the win's blowin' fierce an' the waves lashin' an' lashin', till you'd think every minute was goin' to be your last, an' it blowed, an' blowed — blew is the right word, Joxer, but blowed is what the sailors use. . . .

Joxer. Aw, it's a darlin' word, a daarlin' word.

Boyle. An', as it blowed an' blowed, I ofen looked up at the sky an' assed meself the question — what is the stars, what is the stars?

Voice of Coal Vendor. Any blocks, coal-blocks; blocks, coal-blocks!

Joxer. Ah, that's the question, that's the question — what is the stars?

Boyle. An' then, I'd have another look, an' I'd ass meself — what is the moon?

Joxer. Ah, that's the question — what is the moon, what is the moon?

[*Rapid steps are heard coming towards the door.* Boyle *makes desperate efforts to hide everything;* Joxer *rushes to the window in a frantic effort to get out;* Boyle *begins to innocently lilt — "Oh, me darlin' Jennie, I will be thrue to thee," when the door is opened, and the black face of the* Coal Vendor *appears.*]

The Coal Vendor. D'yes want any blocks?

Boyle [*with a roar*]. No, we don't want any blocks!

Joxer [*coming back with a sigh of relief*]. That's afther puttin' the heart across me — I could ha' sworn it was Juno. I'd betther be goin', Captain; you couldn't tell the minute Juno'd hop in on us.

Boyle. Let her hop in; we may as well have it out first as at last. I've made up me mind — I'm not goin' to do only what she damn well likes.

Joxer. Them sentiments does you credit, Captain; I don't like to say anything as between man an' wife, but I say as a butty, as a butty, Captain, that you've stuck it too long, an' that it's about time you showed a little spunk.

How can a man die betther than facin'
fearful odds,
For th' ashes of his fathers an' the
temples of his gods.

Boyle. She has her rights — there's no one denyin' it, but haven't I me rights too?

Joxer. Of course you have — the sacred rights o' man!

Boyle. To-day, Joxer, there's goin' to be issued a proclamation be me, establishin' an independent Republic, an' Juno'll have to take an oath of allegiance.

Joxer. Be firm, be firm, Captain; the first few minutes'll be the worse: — if you gently touch a nettle it'll sting you for your pains; grasp it like a lad of mettle, an' as soft as silk remains!

Voice of Juno Outside. Can't stop, Mrs. Madigan — I haven't a minute!

Joxer [*flying out of the window*]. Holy God, here she is!

BOYLE [*packing the things away with a rush in the press*]. I knew that fella ud stop till she was in on top of us!

[*He sits down by the fire.*]

[JUNO *enters hastily; she is flurried and excited.*]

JUNO. Oh, you're in — you must have been only afther comin' in?

BOYLE. No, I never went out.

JUNO. It's curious, then, you never heard the knockin'.

[*She puts her coat and hat on bed.*]

BOYLE. Knockin'? Of course I heard the knockin'.

JUNO. An' why didn't you open the door, then? I suppose you were so busy with Joxer that you hadn't time.

BOYLE. I haven't seen Joxer since I seen him before. Joxer! What ud bring Joxer here?

JUNO. D'ye mean to tell me that the pair of yous wasn't collogin' together here when me back was turned?

BOYLE. What ud we be collogin' together about? I have somethin' else to think of besides collogin' with Joxer. I can swear on all the holy prayer-books . . .

MRS. BOYLE. That you weren't in no snug! Go on in at wanst now, an' take aff that moleskin trousers o' yours, an' put on a collar an' tie to smarten yourself up a bit. There's a visitor comin' with Mary in a minute, an' he has great news for you.

BOYLE. A job, I suppose; let us get wan first before we start lookin' for another.

MRS. BOYLE. That's the thing that's able to put the win' up you. Well, it's no job, but news that'll give you the chance o' your life.

BOYLE. What's all the mysthery about?

MRS. BOYLE. G'win an' take off the moleskin trousers when you're told!

[BOYLE *goes into room on left.*]

[MRS. BOYLE *tidies up the room, puts the shovel under the bed, and goes to the press.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, God bless us, looka the way everything's thrun about! Oh, Joxer was here, Joxer was here!

[MARY *enters with* CHARLIE BENTHAM; *he is a young man of twenty-five, tall, good-looking, with a very high opinion of himself generally. He is dressed in a brown coat, brown knee-breeches, grey stockings, a brown sweater, with a deep blue tie; he carries gloves and a walking-stick.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*fussing round*]. Come in, Mr. Bentham; sit down, Mr. Bentham, in this chair; it's more comfortabler than that, Mr. Bentham. Himself'll be here in a minute; he's just takin' off his trousers.

MARY. Mother!

BENTHAM. Please don't put yourself to any trouble, Mrs. Boyle — I'm quite all right here, thank you.

MRS. BOYLE. An' to think of you knowin' Mary, an' she knowin' the news you had for us, an' wouldn't let on; but it's all the more welcomer now, for we were on our last lap!

VOICE OF JOHNNY INSIDE. What are you kickin' up all the racket for?

BOYLE [*roughly*]. I'm takin' off me moleskin trousers!

JOHNNY. Can't you do it, then, without lettin' th' whole house know you're takin' off your trousers? What d'ye want puttin' them on an' takin' them off again?

BOYLE. Will you let me alone, will will you let me alone? Am I never goin' to be done thryin' to please th' whole o' yous?

MRS. BOYLE [*to* BENTHAM]. You must excuse th' state o' th' place, Mr. Bentham; th' minute I turn me back that man o' mine always makes a litther o' th' place, a litther o' th' place.

BENTHAM. Don't worry, Mrs. Boyle; it's all right, I assure . . .

BOYLE [*inside*]. Where's me braces; where in th' name o' God did I leave me braces. . . . Ay, did you see where I put me braces?

JOHNNY [*inside, calling out*]. Ma, will you come in here an' take da away ou' o' this or he'll dhrive me mad.

MRS. BOYLE [*going towards door*].

Dear, dear, dear, that man'll be lookin' for somethin' on th' day o' Judgement. [*Looking into room and calling to* BOYLE.] Look at your braces, man, hangin' round your neck!

BOYLE [*inside*]. Aw, Holy God!

MRS. BOYLE [*calling*]. Johnny, Johnny, come out here for a minute.

JOHNNY. Oh, leave Johnny alone, an' don't be annoyin' him!

MRS. BOYLE. Come on, Johnny, till I inthroduce you to Mr. Bentham. [*To* BENTHAM.] Me son, Mr. Bentham; he's afther goin' through the mill. He was only a chiselur of a Boy Scout in Easter Week, when he got hit in the hip; and his arm was blew off in the fight in O'Connell Street. [JOHNNY *comes in.*] Here he is, Mr. Bentham; Mr. Bentham, Johnny. None can deny he done his bit for Irelan', if that's going to do him any good.

JOHNNY [*boastfully*]. I'd do it agen, ma, I'd do it agen; for a principle's a principle.

MRS. BOYLE. Ah, you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them's the only sort o' principles that's any good to a workin' man.

JOHNNY. Ireland only half free'll never be at peace while she has a son left to pull a trigger.

MRS. BOYLE. To be sure, to be sure —no bread's a lot betther than half a loaf. [*Calling loudly in to* BOYLE.] Will you hurry up there?

[BOYLE *enters in his best trousers, which aren't too good, and looks very uncomfortable in his collar and tie.*]

MRS. BOYLE. This is me husband; Mr. Boyle, Mr. Bentham.

BENTHAM. Ah, very glad to know you, Mr. Boyle. How are you?

BOYLE. Ah, I'm not too well at all; I suffer terrible with pains in me legs. Juno can tell you there what . . .

MRS. BOYLE. You won't have many pains in your legs when you hear what Mr. Bentham has to tell you.

BENTHAM. Juno! What an interesting name! It reminds one of Homer's glorious story of ancient gods and heroes.

BOYLE. Yis, doesn't it? You see, Juno was born an' christened in June; I met her in June; we were married in June, an' Johnny was born in June, so wan day I says to her, "You should ha' been called Juno," an' the name stuck to her ever since.

MRS. BOYLE. Here, we can talk o' them things agen; let Mr. Bentham say what he has to say now.

BENTHAM. Well, Mr. Boyle, I suppose you'll remember a Mr. Ellison of Santry —he's a relative of yours, I think.

BOYLE [*viciously*]. Is it that prognosticator an' procrastinator! Of course I remember him.

BENTHAM. Well, he's dead, Mr. Boyle . . .

BOYLE. Sorra many'll go into mournin' for him.

MRS. BOYLE. Wait till you hear what Mr. Bentham has to say, an' then, maybe, you'll change your opinion.

BENTHAM. A week before he died he sent for me to write his will for him. He told me that there were two only that he wished to leave his property to: his second cousin Michael Finnegan of Santry, and John Boyle, his first cousin of Dublin.

BOYLE [*excitedly*]. Me, is it me, me?

BENTHAM. You, Mr. Boyle; I'll read a copy of the will that I have here with me, which has been duly filed in the Court of Probate.

[*He takes a paper from his pocket and reads*]:

6*th February* 1922.

This is the last Will and Testament of William Ellison, of Santry, in the County of Dublin. I hereby order and wish my property to be sold and divided as follows:—

£20 to the St. Vincent De Paul Society.

£60 for Masses for the repose of my soul (5s. for Each Mass).

The rest of my property to be divided between my first and second cousins.

I hereby appoint Timothy Buckley, of

Santry, and Hugh Briely, of Coolock, to be my Executors.

(*Signed*) WILLIAM ELLISON.
HUGH BRIERLY.
TIMOTHY BUCKLEY.
CHARLES BENTHAM, N.T.

BOYLE [*eagerly*]. An' how much'll be comin' out of it, Mr. Bentham?

BENTHAM. The Executors told me that half of the property would be anything between £1500 and £2000.

MARY. A fortune, father, a fortune!

JOHNNY. We'll be able to get out o' this place now, an' go somewhere we're not known.

MRS. BOYLE. You won't have to trouble about a job for a while, Jack.

BOYLE [*fervently*]. I'll never doubt the goodness o' God agen.

BENTHAM. I congratulate you, Mr. Boyle. [*They shake hands.*]

BOYLE. An' now, Mr. Bentham, you'll have to have a wet.

BENTHAM. A wet?

BOYLE. A wet—a jar—a boul!

MRS. BOYLE. Jack, you're speakin' to Mr. Bentham, an' not to Joxer.

BOYLE [*solemnly*]. Juno . . . Mary . . . Johnny . . . we'll have to go into mournin' at wanst. . . . I never expected that poor Bill ud die so sudden. . . . Well, we all have to die some day . . . you, Juno, to-day . . . an' me, maybe, to-morrow . . . It's sad, but it can't be helped. . . . Requiescat in pace . . . or, usin' our oul' tongue like St. Patrick or St. Briget, Guh sayeree jeea tyera!

MARY. Oh, father, that's not Rest in Peace; that's God save Ireland.

BOYLE. U-u-ugh, it's all the same—isn't it a prayer? . . . Juno, I'm done with Joxer; he's nothin' but a prognosticator an' a . . .

JOXER [*climbing angrily through the window and bounding into the room*]. You're done with Joxer, are you? Maybe you thought I'd stop on the roof all the night for you! Joxer out on the roof with the win' blowin' through him was nothin' to you an' your friend with the collar an' tie!

MRS. BOYLE. What in the name o' God brought you out on the roof; what were you doin' there?

JOXER [*ironically*]. I was dhreamin' I was standin' on the bridge of a ship, an' she sailin' the Antartic Ocean, an' it blowed, an' blowed, an' I lookin' up at the sky an' sayin', what is the stars, what is the stars?

MRS. BOYLE [*opening the door and standing at it*]. Here, get ou' o' this, Joxer Daly; I was always thinkin' you had a slate off.

JOXER [*moving to the door*]. I have to laugh every time I look at the deep sea sailor; an' a row on a river ud make him sea-sick!

BOYLE. Get ou' o' this before I take the law into me own hands!

JOXER [*going out*]. Say aw rewaeawr, but not good-bye. Lookin' for work, an' prayin' to God he won't get it!

[*He goes.*]

MRS. BOYLE. I'm tired tellin' you what Joxer was; maybe now you see yourself the kind he is.

BOYLE. He'll never blow the froth off a pint o' mine agen, that's a sure thing. Johnny . . . Mary . . . you're to keep yourselves to yourselves for the future. Juno, I'm done with Joxer. . . . I'm a new man from this out. . . .

[*Clasping* JUNO'S *hand, and singing emotionally*]:

Oh, me darlin' Juno, I will be thrue to thee;
Me own, me darlin' Juno, you're all the world to me.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same, but the furniture is more plentiful, and of a vulgar nature. A glaringly upholstered armchair and lounge; cheap pictures and photos everywhere. Every available spot is ornamented with huge vases filled with artificial flowers. Crossed festoons of colored paper chains stretch from end to end of ceiling. On the table is an old attaché case.*

It is about six in the evening, and two days after the First Act. BOYLE, *in his shirt sleeves, is voluptuously stretched on the sofa; he is smoking a clay pipe. He is half asleep. A lamp is lighting on the table. After a few moments' pause the voice of* JOXER *is heard singing softly outside at the door—"Me pipe I'll smoke, as I dhrive me moke—are you there, Mor . . . ee . . . ar . . . i . . . teee!"*

BOYLE [*leaping up, takes a pen in his hand and busies himself with papers*]. Come along, Joxer, me son, come along.

JOXER [*putting his head in*]. Are you be yourself?

BOYLE. Come on, come on; that doesn't matther; I'm masther now, an' I'm goin' to remain masther.

[JOXER *comes in.*]

JOXER. How d'ye feel now, as a man o' money?

BOYLE [*solemnly*]. It's a responsibility, Joxer, a great responsibility.

JOXER. I suppose 'tis now, though you wouldn't think it.

BOYLE. Joxer, han' me over that attackey case on the table there. [JOXER *hands the case.*] 'Ever since the will was passed I've run hundhreds o' dockyments through me han's—I tell you, you have to keep your wits about you.

[*He busies himself with papers.*]

JOXER. Well, I won't disturb you; I'll dhrop in when . . .

BOYLE [*hastily*]. It's all right, Joxer, this is the last one to be signed to-day. [*He signs a paper, puts it into the case, which he shuts with a snap, and sits back pompously in the chair.*] Now, Joxer, you want to see me; I'm at your service—what can I do for you, me man?

JOXER. I've just dhropped in with the £3 : 5s. that Mrs. Madigan riz on the blankets an' table for you, an' she says you're to be in no hurry payin' it back.

BOYLE. She won't be long without it; I expect the first cheque for a couple o' hundhred any day. There's the five bob for yourself—go on, take it, man; it'll not be the last you'll get from the Captain. Now an' agen we have our differ, but we're there together all the time.

JOXER. Me for you, an' you for me, like the two Musketeers.

BOYLE. Father Farrell stopped me today an' tole me how glad he was I fell in for the money.

JOXER. He'll be stoppin' you ofen enough now; I suppose it was "Mr." Boyle with him?

BOYLE. He shuk me be the han'. . . .

JOXER [*ironically*]. I met with Napper Tandy, an' he shuk me be the han'!

BOYLE. You're seldom asthray, Joxer, but you're wrong shipped this time. What you're sayin' of Father Farrell is very near to blasfeemey. I don't like any one to talk disrespectful of Father Farrell.

JOXER. You're takin' me up wrong, Captain; I wouldn't let a word be said agen Father Farrell—the heart o' the rowl, that's what he is; I always said he was a darlin' man, a daarlin' man.

BOYLE. Comin' up the stairs who did I meet but that bummer, Nugent. "I seen you talkin' to Father Farrell," says he, with a grin on him. "He'll be folleyin' you," says he, "like a Guardian Angel from this out"—all the time the oul' grin on him, Joxer.

JOXER. I never seen him yet but he had that oul' grin on him!

BOYLE. "Mr. Nugent," says I, "Father Farrell is a man o' the people, an', as far as I know the History o' me country, the priests was always in the van of the fight for Irelan's freedom."

JOXER [*fervently*]:

Who was it led the van, Soggart Aroon?
Since the fight first began, Soggart Aroon?

BOYLE. "Who are you tellin'?" says he. "Didn't they let down the Fenians, an' didn't they do in Parnell? An' now . . ." "You ought to be ashamed o' yourself," says I, interruptin' him, "not to know the History o' your country." An' I left him gawkin' where he was.

JOXER. Where ignorance's bliss 'tis folly to be wise; I wondher did he ever read the Story o' Irelan'.

BOYLE. Be J. L. Sullivan? Don't you know he didn't.

JOXER. Ah, it's a darlin' buk, a daarlin' buk!

BOYLE. You'd betther be goin', now, Joxer, his Majesty, Bentham, 'll be here any minute, now.

JOXER. Be the way things is lookin', it'll be a match between him an' Mary. She's thrun over Jerry altogether. Well, I hope it will, for he's a darlin' man.

BOYLE. I'm glad you think so — I don't. [*Irritably.*] What's darlin' about him?

JOXER [*nonplussed*]. I only seen him twiced; if you want to know me, come an' live with me.

BOYLE. He's too dignified for me — to hear him talk you'd think he knew as much as a Boney's Oraculum. He's given up his job as teacher, an' is goin' to become a solicitor in Dublin — he's been studyin' law. I suppose he thinks I'll set him up, but he's wrong shipped. An' th' other fella — Jerry's as bad. The two o' them ud give you a pain in your face, listenin' to them; Jerry believin' in nothin', an' Bentham believin' in everythin'. One that says all is God an' no man; an' th' other that says all is man an' no God!

JOXER. Well, I'll be off now.

BOYLE. Don't forget to dhrop down afther a while; we'll have a quiet jar, an' a song or two.

JOXER. Never fear.

BOYLE. An' tell MRS. Madigan that I hope we'll have the pleasure of her organization at our little enthertainment.

JOXER. Righto; we'll come down together. [*He goes out.*]

[JOHNNY *comes from room on left, and sits down moodily at the fire.* BOYLE *looks at him for a few moments, and shakes his head. He fills his pipe.*]

VOICE OF JUNO AT THE DOOR. Open the door, Jack; this thing has me nearly kilt with the weight.

[BOYLE *opens the door.* JUNO *enters carrying the box of a gramophone, followed by* MARY *carrying the horn, and some parcels.* JUNO *leaves the box on the table and flops into a chair.*]

JUNO. Carryin' that from Henry Street was no joke.

BOYLE. U-u-ugh, that's a grand lookin' insthrument — how much was it?

JUNO. Pound down, an' five to be paid at two shillin's a week.

BOYLE. That's reasonable enough.

JUNO. I'm afraid we're runnin' into too much debt; first the furniture, an' now this.

BOYLE. The whole lot won't be much out of £2000.

MARY. I don't know what you wanted a gramophone for — I know Charlie hates them; he says they're destructive of real music.

BOYLE. Desthructive of music — that fella ud give you a pain in your face. All a gramophone wants is to be properly played; its thrue wondher is only felt when everythin's quiet —what a gramophone wants is dead silence!

MARY. But, father, Jerry says the same; afther all, you can only appreciate music when your ear is properly trained.

BOYLE. That's another fella ud give you a pain in your face. Properly thrained! I suppose you couldn't appreciate football unless your fut was properly thrained.

MRS. BOYLE [*to* MARY]. Go on in ower that an' dress, or Charlie 'll be in on you, an' tea nor nothin 'll be ready.

[MARY *goes into room left.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*arranging table for tea*]. You didn't look at our new gramophone, Johnny?

JOHNNY. 'Tisn't gramophones I'm thinking of.

MRS. BOYLE. An' what is it you're thinkin' of, allanna?

JOHNNY. Nothin', nothin', nothin'.

MRS. BOYLE. Sure, you must be thinkin' of somethin'; it's yourself that has yourself the way y'are; sleepin' wan night in me sisther's, an' the nex' in your father's brother's — you'll get no rest goin' on that way.

JOHNNY. I can rest nowhere, nowhere, nowhere.

MRS. BOYLE. Sure, you're not thryin' to rest anywhere.

JOHNNY. Let me alone, let me alone, let me alone, for God's sake.

[*A knock at street door.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*in a flutter*]. Here he is; here's Mr. Bentham!

BOYLE. Well, there's room for him; it's a pity there's not a brass band to play him in.

MRS. BOYLE. We'll han' the tea round, an' not be clusthered round the table, as if we never seen nothin'.

[*Steps are heard approaching, and* JUNO, *opening the door, allows* BENTHAM *to enter.*]

JUNO. Give your hat an' stick to Jack, there . . . sit down, Mr. Bentham . . . no, not there . . . in th' easy chair be the fire . . . there, that's betther. Mary'll be out to you in a minute.

BOYLE [*solemnly*]. I seen be the paper this mornin' that Consols was down half per cent. That's serious, min' you, an' shows the whole counthry's in a state o' chassis.

MRS. BOYLE. What's Consols, Jack?

BOYLE. Consols? Oh, Consols is — oh, there's no use tellin' women what Consols is — th' wouldn't undherstand.

BENTHAM. It's just as you were saying, Mr. Boyle . . .

[MARY *enters charmingly dressed.*]

BENTHAM. Oh, good evening, Mary; how pretty you're looking!

MARY [*archly*]. Am I?

BOYLE. We were just talkin' when you kem in, Mary, I was tellin' Mr. Bentham that the whole counthry's in a state o' chassis.

MARY [*to* BENTHAM]. Would you prefer the green or the blue ribbon round me hair, Charlie?

MRS. BOYLE. Mary, your father's speakin'.

BOYLE [*rapidly*]. I was jus' tellin' Mr. Bentham that the whole counthry's in a state o' chassis.

MARY. I'm sure you're frettin', da, whether it is or no.

MRS. BOYLE. With all our churches an' religions, the worl's not a bit the better.

BOYLE [*with a commanding gesture*]. Tay!

[MARY *and* MRS. BOYLE *dispense the tea.*]

MRS. BOYLE. An' Irelan's takin' a leaf out o' the worl's buk; when we got the makin' of our own laws I thought we'd never stop to look behind us, but instead of that we never stopped to look before us! If the people ud folley up their religion betther there'd be a betther chance for us — what do you think, Mr. Bentham?

BENTHAM. I'm afraid I can't venture to express an opinion on that point, Mrs. Boyle; dogma has no attraction for me.

MRS. BOYLE. I forgot you didn't hold with us: what's this you said you were?

BENTHAM. A Theosophist, Mrs. Boyle.

MRS. BOYLE. An' what in the name o' God 's a Theosophist?

BOYLE. A Theosophist, Juno, 's a — tell her, Mr. Bentham, tell her.

BENTHAM. It's hard to explain in a few words: Theosophy's founded on The Vedas, the religious books of the East. Its central theme is the existence of an all-pervading Spirit — the Life-Breath. Nothing really exists but this one Universal Life-Breath. And whatever even seems to exist separately from this Life-Breath, doesn't really exist at all. It is all vital force in man, in all animals, and in all vegetation. This Life-Breath is called the Prawna.

MRS. BOYLE. The Prawna! What a comical name!

BOYLE. Prawna; yis, the Prawna [*Blowing gently through his lips.*] That's the Prawna!

MRS. BOYLE. Whist, whist, Jack.

BENTHAM. The happiness of man depends upon his sympathy with this Spirit. Men who have reached a high state of excellence are called Yogi. Some men become Yogi in a short time, it may take others millions of years.

BOYLE. Yogi! I seen hundhreds o' them in the streets o' San Francisco.

BENTHAM. It is said by these Yogi that if we practise certain mental exer

cises that we would have powers denied to others — for instance, the faculty of seeing things that happen miles and miles away.

MRS. BOYLE. I wouldn't care to meddle with that sort o' belief; it's a very curious religion, altogether.

BOYLE. What's curious about it? Isn't all religions curious? If they weren't, you wouldn't get any one to believe them. But religions is passin' away — they've had their day like everything else. Take the real Dublin people, f'rinstance: they know more about Charlie Chaplin an' Tommy Mix than they do about SS. Peter an' Paul!

MRS. BOYLE. You don't believe in ghosts, Mr. Bentham?

MARY. Don't you know he doesn't, mother?

BENTHAM. I don't know, that, Mary. Scientists are beginning to think that what we call ghosts are sometimes seen by persons of a certain nature. They say that sensational actions, such as the killing of a person, demand great energy, and that that energy lingers in the place where the action occurred. People may live in the place and see nothing, when some one may come along whose personality has some peculiar connection with the energy of the place, and, in a flash, the person sees the whole affair.

JOHNNY [*rising swiftly, pale and affected*]. What sort o' talk is this to be goin' on with? Is there nothin' betther to be talkin' about but the killin' o' people? My God, isn't it bad enough for these things to happen without talkin' about them!

[*He hurriedly goes into the room on left.*]

BENTHAM. Oh, I'm very sorry, Mrs. Boyle; I never thought . . .

MRS. BOYLE [*apologetically*]. Never mind, Mr. Bentham, he's very touchy.

[*A frightened scream is heard from* JOHNNY *inside.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Mother of God, what's that?

[*He rushes out again, his face pale, his lips twitching, his limbs trembling.*]

JOHNNY. Shut the door, shut the doo quick, for God's sake! Great God, hav mercy on me! Blessed Mother o' Go shelter me, shelther your son!

MRS. BOYLE [*catching him in he arms*]. What's wrong with you? Wha ails you? Sit down, sit down, here, o the bed . . . there now . . . there now.

MARY. Johnny, Johnny, what ails you

JOHNNY. I seen him, I seen him . . kneelin' in front o' the statue . . . merc ful Jesus, have pity on me!

MRS. BOYLE [*to* BOYLE]. Get him glass o' whisky . . . quick, man, an' don stand gawkin'.

[BOYLE *gets the whisky.*

JOHNNY. Sit here, sit here, mother . . between me an' the door.

MRS. BOYLE. I'll sit beside you as lon as you like, only tell me what was i came across you at all?

JOHNNY [*after taking some drink*]. seen him. . . . I seen Robbie Tancre kneelin' down before the statue . . . ar the red light shinin' on him . . . ar when I went in . . . he turned an' looke at me . . . an' I seen the woun's bleedin in his breast. . . . Oh, why did he lool at me like that . . . it wasn't my faul that he was done in. . . . Mother o' God keep him away from me!

MRS. BOYLE. There, there, child, you'v imagined it all. There was nothin' ther at all — it was the red light you seen an' the talk we had put all the rest int your head. Here, dhrink more o' this — it'll do you good. . . . An', now, stretch yourself down on the bed for a little [*To* BOYLE.] Go in, Jack, an' show him it was only in his own head i was.

BOYLE [*making no move*]. E-e-e-e-eh it's all nonsense; it was only a shadda he saw.

MARY. Mother o' God, he made me heart lep!

BENTHAM. It was simply due to an overwrought imagination — we all ge that way at times.

MRS. BOYLE. There, dear, lie down in the bed, an' I'll put the quilt across you . . . e-e-e-eh, that's it . . . you'll be as right as the mail in a few minutes.

JOHNNY. Mother, go into the room an

see if the light's lightin' before the statue.

MRS. BOYLE [*to* BOYLE]. Jack, run in, an' see if the light's lightin' before the statue.

BOYLE [*to* MARY]. Mary, slip in an' see if the light's lightin' before the statue.

[MARY *hesitates to go in.*]

BENTHAM. It's all right; Mary, I'll go.

[*He goes into the room; remains for a few moments, and returns.*]

BENTHAM. Everything's just as it was —the light burning bravely before the statue.

BOYLE. Of course; I knew it was all nonsense.

[*A knock at the door.*]

BOYLE [*going to open the door*]. E-e-e-e-eh.

[*He opens it, and* JOXER, *followed by* MRS. MADIGAN, *enters.* MRS. MADIGAN *is a strong, dapper little woman of about forty-five; her face is almost always a widespread smile of complacency. She is a woman who, in manner at least, can mourn with them that mourn, and rejoice with them that do rejoice. When she is feeling comfortable, she is inclined to be reminiscent; when others say anything, or following a statement made by herself, she has a habit of putting her head a little to one side, and nodding it rapidly several times in succession, like a bird pecking at a hard berry. Indeed, she has a good deal of the bird in her, but the bird instinct is by no means a melodious one. She is ignorant, vulgar and forward, but her heart is generous withal. For instance, she would help a neighbor's sick child; she would probably kill the child, but her intentions would be to cure it; she would be more at home helping a drayman to lift a fallen horse. She is dressed in a rather soiled grey dress and a vivid purple blouse; in her hair is a huge comb, ornamented with huge colored beads. She enters with a gliding step, beaming smile and nodding head.* BOYLE *receives them effusively.*]

BOYLE. Come on in, Mrs. Madigan; come on in; I was afraid you weren't comin'. . . . [*Slyly.*] There's some people able to dhress, ay, Joxer?

JOXER. Fair as the blossoms that bloom in the May, an' sweet as the scent of the new mown hay. . . . Ah, well she may wear them.

MRS. MADIGAN [*looking at* MARY]. I know some as are as sweet as the blossoms that bloom in the May — oh, no names, no pack dhrill!

BOYLE. An', now, I'll inthroduce the pair o' yous to Mary's intended: Mr. Bentham, this is Mrs. Madigan, an oul' back-parlor neighbor, that, if she could help it at all, ud never see a body shuk!

BENTHAM [*rising, and tentatively shaking the hand of* MRS. MADIGAN]. I'm sure, it's a great pleasure to know you, Mrs. Madigan.

MRS. MADIGAN. An' I'm goin' to tell you, Mr. Bentham, you're goin' to get as nice a bit o' skirt in Mary, there, as ever you seen in your puff. Not like some of the dhressed up dolls that's knockin' about lookin' for men when it's a skelpin' they want. I remember as well as I remember yestherday, the day she was born — of a Tuesday, the 25th o' June, in the year 1901, at thirty-three minutes past wan in the day be Foley's clock, the pub at the corner o' the street. A cowld day it was too, for the season o' the year, an' I remember sayin' to Joxer there, who I met comin' up th' stairs that the new arrival in Boyle's ud grow up a hardy chiselur if it lived, an' that she'd be somethin' one o' these days that nobody suspected, an' so signs on it, here she is to-day, goin' to be married to a young man lookin' as if he'd be fit to commensurate in any position in life it ud please God to call him!

BOYLE [*effusively*]. Sit down, Mrs Madigan, sit down, me oul' sport. [*To* BENTHAM.] This is Joxer Daly, Pas Chief Ranger of the Dear Little Shamrock Branch of the Irish National Foresters, an oul' front-top neighbor, that never despaired, even in the darkest day of Ireland's sorra.

JOXER. Nil desperandum, Captain, nil desperandum.

BOYLE. Sit down, Joxer, sit down. The two of us was ofen in a tight corner.

MRS. BOYLE. Ay, in Foley's snug!

JOXER. An' we kem out of it flyin', we kem out of it flyin', Captain.

BOYLE. An', now, for a dhrink — I know yous won't refuse an oul' friend.

MRS. MADIGAN [*to* JUNO]. Is Johnny not well, Mrs. . . .

MRS. BOYLE [*warningly*]. S-s-s-sh.

MRS. MADIGAN. Oh, the poor darlin'.

BOYLE. Well, Mrs. Madigan, is it tea or what?

MRS. MADIGAN. Well, speakin' for meself, I jus' had me tea a minute ago, an' I'm afraid to dhrink any more — I'm never the same when I dhrink too much tay. Thanks, all the same, Mr. Boyle.

BOYLE. Well, what about a bottle o' stout or a dhrop o' whisky?

MRS. MADIGAN. A bottle o' stout ud be a little too heavy for me stummock afther me tay. . . . A-a-ah, I'll thry the ball o' malt.

[BOYLE *prepares the whisky.*]

MRS. MADIGAN. There's nothin' like a ball o' malt occasional like — too much of it isn't good. [*To* BOYLE, *who is adding water.*] Ah, God, Johnny, don't put too much wather on it! [*She drinks.*] I suppose yous'll be lavin' this place.

BOYLE. I'm looking for a place near the sea; I'd like the place that you might say was me cradle, to be me grave as well. The sea is always callin' me.

JOXER. She is callin', callin', callin', in the win' an' on the sea.

BOYLE. Another dhrop o' whisky, Mrs. Madigan?

MRS. MADIGAN. Well, now, it ud be hard to refuse seein' the suspicious times that's in it.

BOYLE [*with a commanding gesture*]. Song! . . . Juno . . . Mary . . . "Home to Our Mount'ins"!

MRS. MADIGAN [*enthusiastically*]. Hear hear!

JOXER. Oh, tha's a darlin' song, a daarlin' song!

MARY [*bashfully*]. Ah, no, da; I'm not in a singin' humor.

MRS. MADIGAN. Gawn with you, child, an' you only goin' to be marrid; I remember as well as I remember yesterday, — it was on a lovely August evenin', exactly, accordin' to date, fifteen years ago, come the Tuesday folleyin' the nex' that's comin' on, when me own man [*the Lord be good to him*] an' me was sittin' shy together in a doty little nook on a counthry road, adjacent to The Stiles. "That'll scratch your lovely, little white neck," says he, ketchin' hould of a danglin' bramble branch, holdin' clusters of the loveliest flowers you ever seen, an' breakin' it off, so that his arm fell, accidental like, roun' me waist, an' as I felt it tightenin', an' tightenin', an' tightenin', I thought me buzzum was every minute goin' to burst out into a roystherin' song about

The little green leaves that were shakin' on the threes,
The gallivantin' buttherflies, an' buzzin' o' the bees!

BOYLE. Ordher for the song!

JUNO. Come on, Mary — we'll do our best.

[JUNO *and* MARY *stand up, and choosing a suitable position, sing simply "Home to Our Mountains."*]

[*They bow to company, and return to their places.*]

BOYLE [*emotionally, at the end of song*]. Lull . . . me . . . to . . . rest!

JOXER [*clapping his hands*]. Bravo, bravo! Darlin' girulls, darlin' girulls!

MRS. MADIGAN. Juno, I never seen you in betther form.

BENTHAM. Very nicely rendered indeed.

MRS. MADIGAN. A noble call, a noble call!

MRS. BOYLE. What about yourself, Mrs. Madigan?

[*After some coaxing,* MRS. MADIGAN *rises, and in a quavering voice sings the following verse*]:

If I were a blackbird I'd whistle and sing;
I'd follow the ship that my thrue love was in;
An' on the top riggin', I'd there build me nest,
An' at night I would sleep on me Willie's white breast!

[*Becoming husky, amid applause, she sits down.*]

MRS. MADIGAN. Ah, me voice is too husky now, Juno; though I remember the time when Maisie Madigan could sing like a nightingale at matin' time. I remember as well as I remember yestherday, at a party given to celebrate the comin' of the first chiselur to Annie an' Benny Jimeson — who was the barber, yous may remember, in Henrietta Street, that, afther Easter Week, hung out a green, white an' orange pole, an', then, when the Tans started their Jazz dancin', whipped it in agen, an' stuck out a red, white an' blue wan instead, given as an excuse that a barber's pole was strictly non-political — singin' "An' You'll Remember Me," with the top notes quiverin' in a dead hush of pethrified attention, followed by a clappin' o' han's that shuk the tumblers on the table, an' capped be Jimeson, the barber, sayin' that it was the best rendherin' of "You'll Remember Me" he ever heard in his natural!

BOYLE [*peremptorily*]. Ordher for Joxer's song!

JOXER. Ah, no, I couldn't; don't ass me, Captain.

BOYLE. Joxer's song, Joxer's song — give us wan of your shut-eyed wans.

[JOXER *settles himself in his chair; takes a drink; clears his throat; solemnly closes his eyes, and begins to sing in a very querulous voice*]:

She is far from the lan' where her young hero sleeps,
An' lovers around her are sighing
[*He hesitates.*]
An' lovers around her are sighin' . . . sighin' . . . sighin' . . .

BOYLE [*imitating* JOXER]:

And lovers around her are sighing!

What's the use of you thryin' to sing the song if you don't know it?

MARY. Thry another one, Mr. Daly — maybe you'd be more fortunate.

MRS. MADIGAN. Gawn, Joxer, thry another wan.

JOXER [*starting again*]:

I have heard the mavis singin' his love to the morn;
I have seen the dew-dhrop clingin' to the rose jus' newly born; but . . . but . . . [*frantically*] to the rose jus' newly born . . . newly born . . . born.

JOHNNY. Mother, put on the gramophone, for God's sake, an' stop Joxer's bawlin'.

BOYLE [*commandingly*]. Gramophone! . . . I hate to see fellas thryin' to do what they're not able to do.

[BOYLE *arranges the gramophone, and is about to start it, when voices are heard of persons descending the stairs.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*warningly*]. Whisht, Jack, don't put it on, don't put it on yet; this must be poor Mrs. Tancred comin' down to go to the hospital — I forgot all about them bringin' the body to the church to-night. Open the door, Mary, an' give them a bit o' light.

[MARY *opens the door, and* MRS. TANCRED — *a very old woman, obviously shaken by the death of her son — appears, accompanied by several neighbors. The first few phrases are spoken before they appear.*]

FIRST NEIGHBOR. It's a sad journey we're goin' on, but God's good, an' the Republicans won't be always down.

MRS. TANCRED. Ah, what good is that to me now? Whether they're up or down — it won't bring me darlin' boy from the grave.

MRS. BOYLE. Come in an' have a hot cup o' tay, Mrs. Tancred, before you go.

MRS. TANCRED. Ah, I can take nothin' now, Mrs. Boyle — I won't be long afther him.

FIRST NEIGHBOR. Still an' all, he died a noble death, an' we'll bury him like a king.

MRS. TANCRED. An' I'll go on livin like a pauper. Ah, what's the pains I suffered bringin' him into the world to carry him to his cradle, to the pains I'm sufferin' now, carryin' him out o' the world to bring him to his grave!

MARY. It would be better for you not to go at all, Mrs. Tancred, but to stay at home beside the fire with some o' the neighbors.

MRS. TANCRED. I seen the first of him, an' I'll see the last of him.

MRS. BOYLE. You'd want a shawl, Mrs. Tancred; it's a cowld night, an' the win's blowin' sharp.

MRS. MADIGAN [*rushing out*]. I've a shawl above.

MRS. TANCRED. Me home is gone, now; he was me only child, an' to think that he was lyin' for a whole night stretched out on the side of a lonely counthry lane, with his head, his darlin' head, that I ofen kissed an' fondled, half hidden in the wather of a runnin' brook. An' I'm told he was the leadher of the ambush where me nex' door neighbor, Mrs. Mannin', lost her Free State soldier son. An' now here's the two of us oul' women, standin' one on each side of a scales o' sorra, balanced be the bodies of our two dead darlin' sons. [MRS. MADIGAN *returns, and wraps a shawl around her.*] God bless you, Mrs. Madigan. . . . [*She moves slowly towards the door.*] Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on the pair of us! . . . O Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets! . . . Sacred Heart of the Crucified Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone . . . an' give us hearts o' flesh! . . . Take away this murdherin' hate . . . an' give us Thine own eternal love!

[*They pass out of the room.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*explanatorily to* BENTHAM]. That was Mrs. Tancred of the two-pair back; her son was found, e'er yesterday, lyin' out beyant Finglas riddled with bullets. A die-hard he was, be all accounts. He was a nice quiet boy, but lattherly he went to hell, with his Republic first, an' Republic last an' Republic over all. He ofen took tea with us here, in the oul' days, an' Johnny, there, an' him used to be always together.

JOHNNY. Am I always to be havin' to tell you that he was no friend o' mine? I never cared for him, an' he could never stick me. It's not because he was Commandant of the Battalion that I was Quarther-Masther of, that we were friends.

MRS. BOYLE. He's gone, now—the Lord be good to him! God help his poor oul' creature of a mother, for no matther whose friend or enemy he was, he was her poor son.

BENTHAM. The whole thing is terrible, Mrs. Boyle; but the only way to deal with a mad dog is to destroy him.

MRS. BOYLE. An' to think of me forgettin' about him bein' brought to the church to-night, an' we singin' an' all, but it was well we hadn't the gramophone goin', anyhow.

BOYLE. Even if we had aself. We've nothin' to do with these things, one way or t'other. That's the Government's business, an' let them do what we're payin' them for doin'.

MRS. BOYLE. I'd like to know how a body's not to mind these things; look at the way they're afther leavin' the people in this very house. Hasn't the whole house, nearly been massacreed? There's young Mrs. Dougherty's husband with his leg off; Mrs. Travers that had her son blew up be a mine in Inchegeela, in Co. Cork; Mrs. Mannin' that lost wan of her sons in an ambush a few weeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child gone West with his body made a collandher of. Sure, if it's not our business, I don't know whose business it is.

BOYLE. Here, there, that's enough about them things; they don't affect us, an' we needn't give a damn. If they want a wake, well, let them have a wake. When I was a sailor, I was always resigned to meet with a wathery grave; an', if they want to be soldiers, well, there's no use o' them squealin' when they meet a soldier's fate.

JOXER. Let me like a soldier fall—me breast expandin' to th' ball!

MRS. BOYLE. In wan way, she deserves all she got; for lately, she let th' diehards make an open house of th' place; an' for th' last couple of months, either when th' sun was risin', or when th'

sun was settin', you had C.I.D. men burstin' into your room, assin' you where were you born, where were you christened, where were you married, an' where would you be buried.

JOHNNY. For God's sake, let us have no more o' this talk.

MRS. MADIGAN. What about Mr. Boyle's song before we start th' gramophone?

MARY [*getting her hat, and putting it on*]. Mother, Charlie and I are goin' out for a little sthroll.

MRS. BOYLE. All right, darlin'.

BENTHAM [*going out with* MARY]. We won't be long away, Mrs. Boyle.

MRS. MADIGAN. Gwan, Captain, gwan.

BOYLE. E-e-e-e-eh, I'd want to have a few more jars in me, before I'd be in fettle for singin'.

JOXER. Give us that poem you writ t'other day. [*To the rest.*] Aw, it's a darlin' poem, a daarlin' poem.

MRS. BOYLE. God bless us, is he startin' to write poetry.

BOYLE [*rising to his feet*]. E-e-e-e-eh.

[*He recites in an emotional, consequential manner the following verses*]:

Shawn an' I were friends, sir, to me he was all in all,
His work was very heavy and his wages were very small.
None betther on th' beach as Docker, I'll go bail,
'Tis now I'm feelin' lonely, for to-day he lies in jail.
He was not what some call pious—seldom at church or prayer;
For the greatest scoundrels I know, sir, goes every Sunday there.
Fond of his pint—well, rather, but hated the Boss by creed
But never refused a copper to comfort a pal in need.

E-e-e-e-eh. [*He sits down.*]

MRS. MADIGAN. Grand, grand; you should folley that up, you should folley that up.

JOXER. It's a daarlin' poem!

BOYLE [*delightedly*]. E-e-e-e-eh.

JOHNNY. Are yous goin' to put on th' gramophone to-night, or are yous not?

MRS. BOYLE. Gwan, Jack, put on a record.

MRS. MADIGAN. Gwan, Captain, gwan.

BOYLE. Well, yous'll want to keep a silence.

[*He sets a record, starts the machine, and it begins to play "If you're Irish, come into the Parlor." As the tune is in full blare, the door is suddenly opened by a brisk, little bald-headed man, dressed circumspectly in a black suit; he glares fiercely at all in the room; he is "*NEEDLE NUGENT,*" a tailor. He carries his hat in his hand.*]

NUGENT [*loudly, above the noise of the gramophone*]. Are yous goin' to have that thing bawlin' an' the funeral of Mrs. Tancred's son passin' the house? Have none of yous any respect for the Irish people's National regard for the dead?

[BOYLE *stops the gramophone.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Maybe, Needle Nugent, it's nearly time we had a little less respect for the dead, an' a little more regard for the livin'.

MRS. MADIGAN. We don't want you, Mr. Nugent, to teach us what we learned at our mother's knee. You don't look yourself as if you were dyin' of grief; if y'ass Maisie Madigan anything, I'd call you a real thrue die-hard an' live-soft Republican, attendin' Republican funerals in the day, an' stoppin' up half the night makin' suits for the Civic Guards!

[*Persons are heard running down to the street, some saying, "Here it is, here it is."* NUGENT *withdraws, and the rest, except* JOHNNY, *go to the window looking into the street, and look out. Sounds of a crowd coming nearer are heard; portion are singing*]:

To Jesus' Heart all burning
With fervent love for men,
My heart with fondest yearning
Shall raise its joyful strain.
While ages course along,
Blest be with loudest song,
The Sacred Heart of Jesus
By every heart and tongue.

MRS. BOYLE. Here's the hearse, here's the hearse!

BOYLE. There's t'oul' mother walkin' behin' the coffin.

MRS. MADIGAN. You can hardly see the coffin with the wreaths.

JOXER. Oh, it's a darlin' funeral, a daarlin' funeral!

MRS. MADIGAN. We'd have a betther view from the street.

BOYLE. Yes — this place ud give you a crick in your neck.

[*They leave the room, and go down.* JOHNNY *sits moodily by the fire.*]

[*A young man enters; he looks at* JOHNNY *for a moment.*]

THE YOUNG MAN. Quarther-Masther Boyle.

JOHNNY [*with a start*]. The Mobilizer!

THE YOUNG MAN. You're not at the funeral?

JOHNNY. I'm not well.

THE YOUNG MAN. I'm glad I've found you; you were stoppin' at your aunt's; I called there but you'd gone. I've to give you an ordher to attend a Battalion Staff meetin' the night afther to-morrow.

JOHNNY. Where?

THE YOUNG MAN. I don't know; you're to meet me at the Pillar at eight o'clock; then we're to go to a place I'll be told of to-night; there we'll meet a mothor that'll bring us to the meeting. They think you might be able to know somethin' about them that gave the bend where Commandant Tancred was shelterin'.

JOHNNY. I'm not goin', then. I know nothing about Tancred.

THE YOUNG MAN [*at the door*]. You'd betther come for your own sake — remember your oath.

JOHNNY [*passionately*]. I won't go! Haven't I done enough for Ireland! I've lost me arm, an' me hip's desthroyed so that I'll never be able to walk right agen! Good God, haven't I done enough for Ireland?

THE YOUNG MAN. Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland! [*He goes.*]

[*Faintly in the distance the crowd is heard saying:*]

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee;
Blessed art Thou amongst women, and blessed, etc.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same as Act II. It is about half-past six on a November evening; a bright fire is burning in the grate;* MARY, *dressed to go out, is sitting on a chair by the fire, leaning forward, her hands under her chin, her elbows on her knees. A look of dejection, mingled with uncertain anxiety, is on her face. A lamp, turned low, is lighting on the table. The votive light under the picture of the Virgin, gleams more redly than ever.* MRS. BOYLE *is putting on her hat and coat. It is two months later.*

MRS. BOYLE. An' has Bentham never even written to you since — not one line for the past month?

MARY [*tonelessly*]. Not even a line, mother.

MRS. BOYLE. That's very curious. . . . What came between the two of yous at all? To leave you so sudden, an' yous so great together. . . . To go away t' England, an' not to even leave you his address. . . . The way he was always bringin' you to dances, I thought he was mad afther you. Are you sure you said nothin' to him?

MARY. No, mother — at least nothing that could possibly explain his givin' me up.

MRS. BOYLE. You know you're a bit hasty at times, Mary, an' say things you shouldn't say.

MARY. I never said to him what I shouldn't say, I'm sure of that.

MRS. BOYLE. How are you sure of it?

MARY. Because I love him with all my heart and soul, mother. Why, I don't know; I often thought to myself that he wasn't the man poor Jerry was,

but I couldn't help loving him, all the same.

MRS. BOYLE. But you shouldn't be frettin' the way you are; when a woman loses a man, she never knows what she's afther losin', to be sure, but, then, she never knows what she's afther gainin', either. You're not the one girl of a month ago — you look like one pinin' away. It's long ago I had a right to bring you to the doctor, instead of waitin' till to-night.

MARY. There's no necessity, really, mother, to go to the doctor; nothing serious is wrong with me — I'm run down and disappointed, that's all.

MRS. BOYLE. I'll not wait another minute; I don't like the look of you at all. . . . I'm afraid we made a mistake in throwin' over poor Jerry. . . . He'd have been betther for you than that Bentham.

MARY. Mother, the best man for a woman is the one for whom she has the most love, and Charlie had it all.

MRS. BOYLE. Well, there's one thing to be said for him — he couldn't have been thinkin' of the money, or he wouldn't ha' left you . . . it must ha' been somethin' else.

MARY [*wearily*]. I don't know . . . I don't know, mother . . . only I think . . .

MRS. BOYLE. What d'ye think?

MARY. I imagine . . . he thought . . . we weren't . . . good enough for him.

MRS. BOYLE. An' what was he himself, only a school teacher? Though I don't blame him for fightin' shy of people like that Joxer fella an' that oul' Madigan wan — nice sort o' people for your father to inthroduce to a man like Mr. Bentham. You might have told me all about this before now, Mary; I don't know why you like to hide everything from your mother; you knew Bentham, an' I'd ha' known nothin' about it if it hadn't bin for the will; an' it was only to-day, afther long coaxin', that you let out that he'd left you.

MARY. It would have been useless to tell you — you wouldn't understand.

MRS. BOYLE [*hurt*]. Maybe not. . . . Maybe I wouldn't understand. . . . Well, we'll be off now.

[*She goes over to door left, and speaks to* BOYLE *inside.*]

MRS. BOYLE. We're goin' now to the doctor's. Are you goin' to get up this evenin'?

BOYLE [*from inside*]. The pains in me legs is terrible! It's me should be poppin' off to the doctor instead o' Mary, the way I feel.

MRS. BOYLE. Sorra mend you! A nice way you were in last night — carried in in a frog's march, dead to the world. If that's the way you'll go on when you get the money it'll be the grave for you, an asylum for me and the Poorhouse for Johnny.

BOYLE. I thought you were goin'?

MRS. BOYLE. That's what has you as you are — you can't bear to be spoken to. Knowin' the way we are, up to our ears in debt, it's a wondher you wouldn't ha' got up to go to th' solicitor's an' see if we could ha' gettin' a little o' the money even.

BOYLE [*shouting*]. I can't be goin' up there night, noon an' mornin', can I? He can't give the money till he gets it, can he? I can't get blood out of a turnip, can I?

MRS. BOYLE. It's nearly two months since we heard of the will, an' the money seems as far off as ever. . . . I suppose you know we owe twenty poun's to oul' Murphy?

BOYLE. I've a faint recollection of you tellin' me that before.

MRS. BOYLE. Well, you'll go over to the shop yourself for the things in future — I'll face him no more.

BOYLE. I thought you said you were goin'?

MRS. BOYLE. I'm goin' now; come on, Mary.

BOYLE. Ey, Juno, ey!

MRS. BOYLE. Well, what d'ye want now?

BOYLE. Is there e'er a bottle o' stout left?

MRS. BOYLE. There's two o' them here still.

BOYLE. Show us in one o' them an' leave t'other there till I get up. An'

throw us in the paper that's on the table, an' the bottle o' Sloan's Liniment that's in th' drawer.

MRS. BOYLE [*getting the liniment and the stout*]. What paper is it you want — the *Messenger*?

BOYLE. *Messenger! The News o' the World!*

[MRS. BOYLE *brings in the things asked for and comes out again.*]

MRS. BOYLE [*at door*]. Mind the candle, now, an' don't burn the house over our heads. I left t'other bottle o' stout on the table.

[*She puts bottle of stout on table. She goes out with* MARY. *A cork is heard popping inside.*]

[*A pause; then outside the door is heard the voice of* JOXER *lilting softly: "Me pipe I'll smoke, as I dhrive me moke . . . are you . . . there . . . More . . . aar . . . i . . . tee!" A gentle knock is heard and, after a pause, the door opens, and* JOXER, *followed by* NUGENT, *enters.*]

JOXER. Be God, they must be all out; I was thinkin' there was somethin' up when he didn't answer the signal. We seen Juno an' Mary goin', but I didn't see him, an' it's very seldom he escapes me.

NUGENT. He's not goin' to escape me — he's not goin' to be let go to the fair altogether.

JOXER. Sure, the house couldn't hould them lately; an' he goin' about like a mastherpiece of the Free State country; forgettin' their friends; forgettin' God — wouldn't even lift his hat passin' a chapel! Sure they were bound to get a dhrop! An' you really think there's no money comin' to him afther all?

NUGENT. Not as much as a red rex, man; I've been a bit anxious this long time over me money, an' I went up to the solicitor's to find out all I could — ah, man, they were goin' to throw me down the stairs. They toul' me that the oul' cock himself had the stairs worn away comin' up afther it, an' they black in the face tellin' him he'd get nothin'. Some way or another that the will is writ he won't be entitled to get as much as a make!

JOXER. Ah, I thought there was somethin' curious about the whole thing: I've bin havin' sthrange dhreams for the last couple o' weeks. An' I notice that that Bentham fella doesn't be comin' here now — there must be somethin' on the mat there too. Anyhow, who, in the name o' God, ud leave anythin' to that oul' bummer? Sure it ud be unnatural. An' the way Juno an' him's been throwin' their weight about for the last few months! Ah, him that goes a borrowin' goes a sorrowin'!

NUGENT. Well, he's not goin' to throw his weight about in the suit I made for him much longer. I'm tellin' you seven poun's aren't to be found growin' on the bushes these days.

JOXER. An' there isn't hardly a neighbor in the whole street that hasn't lent him money on the strength of what he was goin' to get, but they're after backing the wrong horse. Wasn't it a mercy o' God that I'd nothin' to give him! The softy I am, you know, I'd ha' lent him me last juice! I must have had somebody's good prayers. Ah, afther all, an honest man's the noblest work o' God! [BOYLE *coughs inside.*]

JOXER. Whisht, damn it, he must be inside in bed.

NUGENT. Inside o' bed or outside of it he's goin' to pay me for that suit, or give it back — he'll not climb up my back as easily as he thinks.

JOXER. Gwan in at wanst, man, an' get it off him, an' don't be a fool.

NUGENT [*going to door left, opening it and looking in*]. Ah, don't disturb yourself, Mr. Boyle; I hope you're not sick?

BOYLE. Th' oul' legs, Mr. Nugent, the oul' legs.

NUGENT. I just called over to see if you could let me have anything off the suit?

BOYLE. E-e-e-eh, how much is this it is?

NUGENT. It's the same as it was at the start — seven poun's.

BOYLE. I'm glad you kem, Mr. Nu-

gent; I want a good heavy top-coat — Irish frieze, if you have it. How much would a top-coat like that be now?

NUGENT. About six poun's.

BOYLE. Six poun's — six an' seven, six an' seven is thirteen — that'll be thirteen poun's I'll owe you.

[JOXER *slips the bottle of stout that is on the table into his pocket.* NUGENT *rushes into the room, and returns with suit on his arm; he pauses at the door.*]

NUGENT. You'll owe me no thirteen poun's. Maybe you think you're better able to owe it than pay it!

BOYLE [*frantically*]. Here, come back to hell ower that — where're you goin' with them clothes o' mine?

NUGENT. Where am I goin' with them clothes o' yours? Well, I like your damn cheek!

BOYLE. Here, what am I goin' to dhress meself in when I'm goin' out?

NUGENT. What do I care what you dhress yourself in? You can put yourself in a bolsther cover, if you like.

[*He goes towards the other door, followed by* JOXER.]

JOXER. What'll he dhress himself in! Gentleman Jack an' his frieze coat!

[*They go out.*]

BOYLE [*inside*]. Ey, Nugent, ey, Mr. Nugent, Mr. Nugent!

[*After a pause* BOYLE *enters hastily, buttoning the braces of his moleskin trousers; his coat and vest are on his arm; he throws these on a chair and hurries to the door on right.*]

BOYLE. Ey, Mr. Nugent, Mr. Nugent!

JOXER [*meeting him at the door*]. What's up, what's wrong, Captain?

BOYLE. Nugent's been here an' took away me suit — the only things I had to go out in!

JOXER. Tuk your suit — for God's sake! An' what were you doin' while he was takin' them?

BOYLE. I was in bed when he stole in like a thief in the night, an' before I knew even what he was thinkin' of, he whipped them from the chair, an' was off like a redshank!

JOXER. An' what, in the name o' God, did he do that for?

BOYLE. What did he do it for? How the hell do I know what he done it for? Jealousy an' spite, I suppose.

JOXER. Did he not say what he done it for?

BOYLE. Amn't I afther tellin' you that he had them whipped up an' was gone before I could open me mouth?

JOXER. That was a very sudden thing to do; there mus' be somethin' behin' it. Did he hear anythin', I wondher?

BOYLE. Did he hear anythin'? — you talk very queer, Joxer — what could he hear?

JOXER. About you not gettin' the money, in some way or t'other?

BOYLE. An' what ud prevent me from gettin' th' money?

JOXER. That's jus' what I was thinkin' — what ud prevent you from gettin' the money — nothin', as far as I can see.

BOYLE. [*looking round for bottle of stout with an exclamation*]. Aw, holy God!

JOXER. What's up, Jack?

BOYLE. He must have afther lifted the bottle o' stout that Juno left on the table!

JOXER [*horrified*]. Ah, no, ah, no! He wouldn't be afther doin' that, now.

BOYLE. An' who done it then? Juno left a bottle o' stout here, an' it's gone — it didn't walk, did it?

JOXER. Oh, that's shockin'; ah, man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn!

MRS. MADIGAN [*appearing at the door*]. I hope I'm not disturbin' you in any discussion on your forthcomin' legacy — if I may use the word — an' that you'll let me have a barny for a minute or two with you, Mr. Boyle.

BOYLE [*uneasily*]. To be sure, Mrs. Madigan — an oul' friend's always welcome.

JOXER. Come in the evenin', come in th' mornin'; come when you're assed, or come without warnin', Mrs. Madigan.

BOYLE. Sit down, Mrs. Madigan.

MRS. MADIGAN [*ominously*]. Th' few

words I have to say can be said standin'. Puttin' aside all formularies, I suppose you remember me lendin' you some time ago three poun's that I raised on blankets an' furniture in me uncle's?

BOYLE. I remember it well. I have it recorded in me book — three poun's five shillin's from Maisie Madigan, raised on articles pawned; an', item: fourpence, given to make up the price of a pint, on th' principle that no bird ever flew on wan wing; all to be repaid at par, when the ship comes home.

MRS. MADIGAN. Well, ever since I shoved in the blankets I've been perishing with th' cowld, an' I've decided, if I'll be too hot in th' nex' world aself, I'm not goin' to be too cowld in this wan; an' consequently, I want me three poun's, if you please.

BOYLE. This is a very sudden demand, Mrs. Madigan, an' can't be met; but I'm willin' to give you a receipt in full, in full.

MRS. MADIGAN. Come on, out with th' money, an' don't be jack-actin'.

BOYLE. You can't get blood out of a turnip, can you?

MRS. MADIGAN [*rushing over and shaking him*]. Gimme me money, y'oul' reprobate, or I'll shake the worth of it out of you!

BOYLE. Ey, houl' on, there; houl' on, there! You'll wait for your money now, me lassie!

MRS. MADIGAN [*looking around the room and seeing the gramophone*]. I'll wait for it, will I? Well, I'll not wait long; if I can't get th' cash, I'll get th' worth of it.

[*She catches up the gramophone.*]

BOYLE. Ey, ey, there, wher'r you goin' with that?

MRS. MADIGAN. I'm goin' to th' pawn to get me three quid five shillin's; I'll brin' you th' ticket, an' then you can do what you like, me bucko.

BOYLE. You can't touch that, you can't touch that! It's not my property, an' it's not ped for yet!

MRS. MADIGAN. So much th' betther. It'll be an ayse to me conscience, for I'm takin' what doesn't belong to you. You're not goin' to be swankin' it like a paycock with Maisie Madigan's money — I'll pull some o' th' gorgeous feathers out o' your tail!

[*She goes off with the gramophone.*]

BOYLE. What's th' world comin' to at all? I ass you, Joxer Daly, is there any morality left anywhere?

JOXER. I wouldn't ha' believed it, only I seen it with me own two eyes. I didn't think Maisie Madigan was that sort of a woman; she has either a sup taken, or she's heard somethin'.

BOYLE. Heard somethin' — about what, if it's not any harm to ass you?

JOXER. She must ha' heard some rumor or other that you weren't goin' to get th' money.

BOYLE. Who says I'm not goin' to get th' money?

JOXER. Sure, I know — I was only sayin'.

BOYLE. Only sayin' what?

JOXER. Nothin'.

BOYLE. You were goin' to say somethin', don't be a twisther.

JOXER [*angrily*]. Who's a twisther?

BOYLE. Why don't you speak your mind, then?

JOXER. You never twisted yourself — no, you wouldn't know how!

BOYLE. Did you ever know me to twist; did you ever know me to twist?

JOXER [*fiercely*]. Did you ever do anythin' else! Sure, you can't believe a word that comes out o' your mouth.

BOYLE. Here, get out, ower o' this; I always knew you were a prognosticator an' a procrastinator!

JOXER [*going out as* JOHNNY *comes in*]. The anchor's weighed, farewell, re . . . mem . . . ber . . . me. Jacky Boyle, Esquire, infernal rogue an' damned liar!

JOHNNY. Joxer an' you at it agen? — when are you goin' to have a little respect for yourself, an' not be always makin' a show of us all?

BOYLE. Are you goin' to lecture me now?

JOHNNY. Is mother back from the doctor yet, with Mary?

[MRS. BOYLE *enters; it is apparent from the serious look on her face that something has happened. She*

takes off her hat and coat without a word and puts them by. She then sits down near the fire, and there is a few moments' pause.]

BOYLE. Well, what did the doctor say about Mary?

MRS. BOYLE [*in an earnest manner and with suppressed agitation*]. Sit down here, Jack; I've something to say to you . . . about Mary.

BOYLE [*awed by her manner*]. About . . . Mary?

MRS. BOYLE. Close that door there and sit down here.

BOYLE [*closing the door*]. More throuble in our native land, is it? [*He sits down.*] Well, what is it?

MRS. BOYLE. It's about Mary.

BOYLE. Well, what about Mary — there's nothin' wrong with her, is there?

MRS. BOYLE. I'm sorry to say there's a gradle wrong with her.

BOYLE. A gradle wrong with her! [*Peevishly.*] First Johnny an' now Mary; is the whole house goin' to become an hospital! It's not consumption, is it?

MRS. BOYLE. No . . . it's not consumption . . . it's worse.

JOHNNY. Worse! Well, we'll have to get her into some place ower this, there's no one here to mind her.

MRS. BOYLE. We'll all have to mind her now. You might as well know now, Johnny, as another time. [*To* BOYLE.] D'ye know what the doctor said to me about her, Jack?

BOYLE. How ud I know — I wasn't there, was I?

MRS. BOYLE. He told me to get her married at wanst.

BOYLE. Married at wanst! An' why did he say the like o' that?

MRS. BOYLE. Because Mary's goin' to have a baby in a short time.

BOYLE. Goin' to have a baby! — my God, what'll Bentham say when he hears that?

MRS. BOYLE. Are you blind, man, that you can't see that it was Bentham that has done this wrong to her?

BOYLE [*passionately*]. Then he'll marry her, he'll have to marry her!

MRS. BOYLE. You know he's gone to England, an' God knows where he is now.

BOYLE. I'll folley him, I'll folley him, an' bring him back, an' make him do her justice. The scoundrel, I might ha' known what he was, with his yogees an' his prawna!

MRS. BOYLE. We'll have to keep it quiet till we see what we can do.

BOYLE. Oh, isn't this a nice thing to come on top o' me, an' the state I'm in! A pretty show I'll be to Joxer an' to that oul' wan, Madigan! Amn't I afther goin' through enough without havin' to go through this!

MRS. BOYLE. What you an' I'll have to go through'll be nothin' to what poor Mary'll have to go through; for you an' me is middlin' old, an' most of our years is spent; but Mary'll have maybe forty years to face an' handle, an' every wan of them'll be tainted with a bitther memory.

BOYLE. Where is she? Where is she till I tell her off? I'm tellin' you when I'm done with her she'll be a sorry girl!

MRS. BOYLE. I left her in me sisther's till I came to speak to you. You'll say nothin' to her, Jack; ever since she left school she's earned her livin', an' your fatherly care never throubled the poor girl.

BOYLE. Gwan, take her part agen her father! But I'll let you see whether I'll say nothin' to her or no! Her an' her readin'! That's more o' th' blasted nonsense that has the house fallin' down on top of us! What did th' likes of her, born in a tenement house, want with readin'? Her readin's afther bringin' her to a nice pass — oh, it's madnin', madnin', madnin'!

MRS. BOYLE. When she comes back say nothin' to her, Jack, or she'll leave this place.

BOYLE. Leave this place! Ay, she'll leave this place, an' quick too!

MRS. BOYLE. If Mary goes, I'll go with her.

BOYLE. Well, go with her! Well, go, th' pair o' yous! I lived before I seen yous, an' I can live when yous are gone.

Isn't this a nice thing to come rollin' in on top o' me afther all your prayin' to St. Anthony an' The Little Flower. An' she's a child o' Mary, too — I wonder what'll the nuns think of her now? An' it'll be bellows'd all over th' disthrict before you can say Jack Robinson; an' whenever I'm seen they'll whisper, "That's th' father of Mary Boyle that had th' kid be th' swank she used to go with; d'ye know, d'ye know?" To be sure they'll know — more about it than I will meself!

JOHNNY. She should be dhriven out o' th' house she's brought disgrace on!

MRS. BOYLE. Hush, you, Johnny. We needn't let it be bellows'd all over the place; all we've got to do is to leave this place quietly an' go somewhere where we're not known, an' nobody'll be th' wiser.

BOYLE. You're talkin' like a two-year-oul', woman. Where'll we get a place ou' o' this? — places aren't that easily got.

MRS. BOYLE. But, Jack, when we get the money . . .

BOYLE. Money — what money?

MRS. BOYLE. Why, oul' Ellison's money, of course.

BOYLE. There's no money comin' from oul' Ellison, or any one else. Since you've heard of wan throuble, you might as well hear of another. There's no money comin' to us at all — the will's a wash out!

MRS. BOYLE. What are you sayin', man — no money?

JOHNNY. How could it be a wash out?

BOYLE. The boyo that's afther doin' it to Mary done it to me as well. The thick made out the will wrong; he said in th' will, only first cousin an' second cousin, instead of mentionin' our names, an' now any one that thinks he's a first cousin or second cousin t' oul' Ellison can claim the money as well as me, an' they're springin' up in hundreds, an' comin' from America an' Australia, thinkin' to get their whack out of it, while all the time the lawyers is goblin' it up, till there's not as much as ud buy a stockin' for your lovely daughter's baby!

MRS. BOYLE. I don't believe it, I don't believe it, I don't believe it!

JOHNNY. Why did you say nothin' about this before?

MRS. BOYLE. You're not serious, Jack; you're not serious!

BOYLE. I'm tellin' you the scholar, Bentham, made a banjax o' th' will; instead o' sayin', "th' rest o' me property to be divided between me first cousin, Jack Boyle, an' me second cousin, Mick Finnegan, o' Santhry," he writ down only, "me first an' second cousins," an' the world an' his wife are afther th' property now.

MRS. BOYLE. Now, I know why Bentham left poor Mary in th' lurch; I can see it all now — oh, is there not even a middlin' honest man left in th' world?

JOHNNY [*to* BOYLE]. An' you let us run into debt, an' you borreyed money from everybody to fill yourself with beer! An' now, you tell us the whole thing's a wash out! Oh, if it's thrue, I'm done with you, for you're worse than me sisther Mary!

BOYLE. You hole your tongue, d'ye hear? I'll not take any lip from you. Go an' get Bentham if you want satisfaction for all that's afther happenin' us.

JOHNNY. I won't hole me tongue, I won't hole me tongue! I'll tell you what I think of you, father an' all as you are . . . you . . .

MRS. BOYLE. Johnny, Johnny, for God's sake, be quiet!

JOHNNY. I'll not be quiet, I'll not be quiet; he's a nice father, isn't he? Is it any wondher Mary went asthray, when . . .

MRS. BOYLE. Johnny, Johnny, for my sake be quiet — for your mother's sake!

BOYLE. I'm goin' out now to have a few dhrinks with th' last few makes I have, an' tell that lassie o' yours not to be here when I come back; for if I lay me eyes on her, I'll lay me han's on her, an' if I lay me han's on her, I won't be accountable for me actions!

JOHNNY. Take care somebody doesn't lay his han's on you — y' oul' . . .

MRS. BOYLE. Johnny, Johnny!

BOYLE [*at door, about to go out*]. Oh, a nice son, an' a nicer daughter, I have. [*Calling loudly upstairs.*] Joxer, Joxer, are you there?

JOXER [*from a distance*]. I'm here, More . . . ee . . . aar . . . i . . . tee!

BOYLE. I'm goin' down to Foley's—are you comin'?

JOXER. Come with you? With that sweet call me heart is stirred; I'm only waiting for the word, an' I'll be with you, like a bird!

[BOYLE *and* JOXER *pass the door going out.*]

JOHNNY [*throwing himself on the bed*]. I've a nice sisther, an' a nice father, there's no bettin' on it. I wish to God a bullet or a bomb had whipped me ou' o' this long ago! Not one o' yous, not one o' yous, have any thought for me!

MRS. BOYLE [*with passionate remonstrance*]. If you don't whisht, Johnny, you'll drive me mad. Who has kep' th' home together for the past few years—only me. An' who'll have to bear th' biggest part o' this throuble but me—but whinin' an' whingin' isn't goin' to do any good.

JOHNNY. You're to blame yourself for a gradle of it—givin' him his own way in everything, an' never assin' to check him, no matther what he done. Why didn't you look afther th' money? why . . .

[*There is a knock at the door;* MRS. BOYLE *opens it;* JOHNNY *rises on his elbow to look and listen; two men enter.*]

FIRST MAN. We've been sent up be th' Manager of the Hibernian Furnishing Co., Mrs. Boyle, to take back the furniture that was got a while ago.

MRS. BOYLE. Yous'll touch nothin' here—how do I know who yous are?

FIRST MAN [*showing a paper*]. There's the ordher, ma'am. [*Reading.*] A chest o' drawers, a table, wan easy an' two ordinary chairs; wan mirror; wan chestherfield divan, an' a wardrobe an' two vases. [*To his comrade.*] Come on, Bill it's afther knockin' off time already.

JOHNNY. For God's sake, mother, run down to Foley's an' bring father back, or we'll be left without a stick.

[*The men carry out the table.*]

MRS. BOYLE. What good would it be? You heard what he said before he went out.

JOHNNY. Can't you thry? He ought to be here, an' the like of this goin' on.

[MRS. BOYLE *puts a shawl around her, as* MARY *enters.*]

MARY. What's up, mother? I met men carryin' away the table, an' everybody's talking about us not gettin' the money after all.

MRS. BOYLE. Everythin's gone wrong, Mary, everythin'. We're not gettin' a penny out o' the will, not a penny—I'll tell you all when I come back; I'm goin' for your father.

[*She runs out.*]

JOHNNY [*to* MARY, *who has sat down by the fire*]. It's a wondher you're not ashamed to show your face here, afther what has happened.

[JERRY *enters slowly; there is a look of earnest hope on his face. He looks at* MARY *for a few moments.*]

JERRY [*softly*]. Mary!

[MARY *does not answer.*]

JERRY. Mary, I want to speak to you for a few moments, may I?

[MARY *remains silent;* JOHNNY *goes slowly into room on left.*]

JERRY. Your mother has told me everything, Mary, and I have come to you. . . . I have come to tell you, Mary, that my love for you is greater and deeper than ever. . . .

MARY [*with a sob*]. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, say no more; all that is over now; anything like that is impossible now!

JERRY. Impossible? Why do you talk like that, Mary?

MARY. After all that has happened.

JERRY. What does it matter what has happened? We are young enough to be able to forget all those things. [*He catches her hand.*] Mary, Mary, I am pleading for your love. With Labor, Mary, humanity is above everything; we are the Leaders in the fight for a

new life. I want to forget Bentham, I want to forget that you left me — even for a while.

MARY. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, you haven't the bitter word of scorn for me after all.

JERRY [*passionately*]. Scorn! I love you, love you, Mary!

MARY [*rising, and looking him in the eyes*]. Even though . . .

JERRY. Even though you threw me over for another man; even though you gave me many a bitter word!

MARY. Yes, yes, I know; but you love me, even though . . . even though . . . I'm . . . goin' . . . goin' . . . [*He looks at her questioningly, and fear gathers in his eyes.*] Ah, I was thinkin' so. . . . You don't know everything!

JERRY [*poignantly*]. Surely to God, Mary, you don't mean that . . . that . . . that . . .

MARY. Now you know all, Jerry; now you know all!

JERRY. My God, Mary, have you fallen as low as that?

MARY. Yes, Jerry, as you say, I have fallen as low as that.

JERRY. I didn't mean it that way, Mary . . . it came on me so sudden, that I didn't mind what I was sayin' . . . I never expected this — your mother never told me. . . . I'm sorry . . . God knows, I'm sorry for you, Mary.

MARY. Let us say no more, Jerry; I don't blame you for thinkin' it's terrible. . . . I suppose it is. . . . Everybody'll think the same. . . . It's only as I expected — your humanity is just as narrow as the humanity of the others.

JERRY. I'm sorry, all the same. . . . I shouldn't have troubled you. . . . I wouldn't if I'd known . . . if I can do anything for you . . . Mary . . . I will.

[*He turns to go, and halts at the door.*]

MARY. Do you remember, Jerry, the verses you read when you gave the lecture in the Socialist Rooms some time ago, on Humanity's Strife with Nature?

JERRY. The verses — no; I don't remember them.

MARY. I do. They're runnin' in me head now —

An' we felt the power that fashion'd
All the lovely things we saw,
That created all the murmur
Of an everlasting law,
Was a hand of force an' beauty,
With an eagle's tearin' claw.

Then we saw our globe of beauty
Was an ugly thing as well,
A hymn divine whose chorus
Was an agonizin' yell;
Like the story of a demon,
That an angel had to tell.

Like a glowin' picture by a
Hand unsteady, brought to ruin;
Like her craters, if their deadness
Could give life unto the moon;
Like the agonizing horror
Of a violin out of tune.

[*There is a pause, and* DEVINE *goes slowly out.*]

JOHNNY [*returning*]. Is he gone?

MARY. Yes.

[*The two men re-enter.*]

FIRST MAN. We can't wait any longer for t' oul' fella — sorry, Miss, but we have to live as well as th' nex' man.

[*They carry out some things.*]

JOHNNY. Oh, isn't this terrible! . . . I suppose you told him everything . . . couldn't you have waited for a few days . . . he'd have stopped th' takin' of the things, if you'd kep' your mouth shut. Are you burnin' to tell every one of the shame you've brought on us?

MARY [*snatching up her hat and coat*]. Oh, this is unbearable!

[*She rushes out.*]

FIRST MAN [*re-entering*]. We'll take the chest o' drawers next — it's the heaviest.

[*The votive light flickers for a moment, and goes out.*]

JOHNNY [*in a cry of fear*]. Mother o' God, the light's afther goin' out!

FIRST MAN. You put the win' up me the way you bawled that time. The oil's all gone, that's all.

JOHNNY [*with an agonizing cry*]. Mother o' God, there's a shot I'm afther gettin'!

FIRST MAN. What's wrong with you, man? Is it a fit you're takin'?

JOHNNY. I'm afther feelin' a pain in me breast, like the tearin' by a bullet!

FIRST MAN. He's goin' mad — it's a wondher they'd leave a chap like that here be himself.

[*Two* IRREGULARS *enter swiftly; they carry revolvers; one goes over to* JOHNNY; *the other covers the two furniture men.*]

FIRST IRREGULAR [*to the men, quietly and incisively*]. Who are you — what are yous doin' here — quick!

FIRST MAN. Removin' furniture that's not paid for.

IRREGULAR. Get over to the other end of the room an' turn your faces to the wall — quick.

[*The two men turn their faces to the wall, with their hands up.*]

SECOND IRREGULAR [*to* JOHNNY]. Come on, Sean Boyle, you're wanted; some of us have a word to say to you.

JOHNNY. I'm sick, I can't — what do you want with me?

SECOND IRREGULAR. Come on, come on; we've a distance to go, an' haven't much time — come on.

JOHNNY. I'm an oul' comrade — yous wouldn't shoot an oul' comrade.

SECOND IRREGULAR. Poor Tancred was an oul' comrade o' yours, but you didn't think o' that when you gave him away to the gang that sent him to his grave. But we've no time to waste; come on — here, Dermot, ketch his arm. [*To* JOHNNY.] Have you your beads?

JOHNNY. Me beads! Why do you ass me that, why do you ass me that?

SECOND IRREGULAR. Go on, go on, march!

JOHNNY. Are yous goin' to do in a comrade — look at me arm, I lost it for Ireland.

SECOND IRREGULAR. Commandant Tancred lost his life for Ireland.

JOHNNY. Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me! Mother o' God, pray for me — be with me now in the agonies o' death! . . . Hail, Mary, full o' grace . . . the Lord is . . . with Thee.

[*They drag out* JOHNNY BOYLE, *and the curtain falls. When it rises again the most of the furniture is gone.* MARY *and* MRS. BOYLE, *one on each side, are sitting in a darkened room, by the fire; it is an hour later.*]

MRS. BOYLE. I'll not wait much longer . . . what did they bring him away in the mothor for? Nugent says he thinks they had guns . . . is me throubles never goin' to be over? . . . If anything ud happen to poor Johnny, I think I'd lost me mind. . . . I'll go to the Police Station, surely they ought to be able to do somethin'.

[*Below is heard the sound of voices.*]

MRS. BOYLE. Whisht, is that something? Maybe, it's your father, though when I left him in Foley's he was hardly able to lift his head. Whisht!

[*A knock at the door, and the voice of* MRS. MADIGAN, *speaking very softly*]:

Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Boyle.

[MRS. BOYLE *opens the door.*]

MRS. MADIGAN. Oh, Mrs. Boyle, God an' His Blessed Mother be with you this night!

MRS. BOYLE [*calmly*]. What is it, Mrs. Madigan? It's Johnny — something about Johnny.

MRS. MADIGAN. God send it's not, God send it's not Johnny!

MRS. BOYLE. Don't keep me waitin', Mrs. Madigan; I've gone through so much lately that I feel able for anything.

MRS. MADIGAN. Two polismen below wantin' you.

MRS. BOYLE. Wantin' me; an' why do they want me?

MRS. MADIGAN. Some poor fella's been found, an' they think it's, it's . . .

MRS. BOYLE. Johnny, Johnny!

MARY [*with her arms round her mother*]. Oh, mother, mother, me poor, darlin' mother.

MRS. BOYLE. Hush, hush, darlin'; you'll shortly have your own throuble to bear. [*To* MRS. MADIGAN.] An' why do the polis think it's Johnny, Mrs. Madigan?

MRS. MADIGAN. Because one o' the doctors knew him when he was attendin' with his poor arm.

MRS. BOYLE. Oh, it's thrue, then; it's Johnny, it's me son, me own son!

MARY. Oh, it's thrue, it's thrue what Jerry Devine says — there isn't a God, there isn't a God; if there was He wouldn't let these things happen!

MRS. BOYLE. Mary, Mary, you mustn't say them things. We'll want all the help we can get from God an' His Blessed Mother now! These things have nothin' to do with the Will o' God. Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity o' men!

MRS. MADIGAN. The polis want you to go with them to the hospital to see the poor body — they're waitin' below.

MRS. BOYLE. We'll go. Come, Mary, an' we'll never come back here agen. Let your father furrage for himself now; I've done all I could an' it was all no use — he'll be hopeless till the end of his days. I've got a little room in me sisther's where we'll stop till your throuble is over, an' then we'll work together for the sake of the baby.

MARY. My poor little child that'll have no father!

MRS. BOYLE. It'll have what's far better — it'll have two mothers.

[*A rough voice shouting from below*]: Are yous goin' to keep us waitin' for yous all night?

MRS. MADIGAN [*going to the door, and shouting down*]. Take your hour, there, take your hour! If yous are in such a hurry, skip off, then, for nobody wants you here — if they did yous wouldn't be found. For you're the same as yous were undher the British Government — never where yous are wanted! As far as I can see, the Polis as Polis, in this city, is Null an' Void!

MRS. BOYLE. We'll go, Mary, we'll go; you to see your poor dead brother, an' me to see me poor dead son!

MARY. I dhread it, mother, I dhread it!

MRS. BOYLE. I forgot, Mary, I forgot; your poor oul' selfish mother was only thinkin' of herself. No, no, you mustn't come — it wouldn't be good for you. You go on to me sisther's an' I'll face th' ordeal meself. Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now — because he was a Die-hard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Die-hard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! It's well I remember all that she said — an' it's my turn to say it now: What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!

[*They all go slowly out. There is a pause; then a sound of shuffling steps on the stairs outside. The door opens and* BOYLE *and* JOXER, *both of them very drunk, enter.*]

BOYLE. I'm able to go no farther. . . . Two polis, ey . . . what were they doin' here, I wondher? . . . Up to no good, anyhow . . . an' Juno an' that lovely daughter o' mine with them. [*Taking a sixpence from his pocket and looking at it.*] Wan single, solithary tanner left out of all I borreyed. . . . [*He lets it fall.*] The last o' the Mohicans. . . . The blinds is down, Joxer, the blinds is down!

JOXER [*walking unsteadily across the room, and anchoring at the bed*]. Put all . . . your throubles . . . in your oul' kit bag . . . an' smile . . . smile . . . smile!

BOYLE. The counthry'll have to steady itself . . . it's goin' . . . to hell . . . Where'r all . . . the chairs . . . gone to . . . steady itself, Joxer. . . . Chairs'll . . . have to . . . steady themselves. . . . No matther . . . what any one may . . . say. . . . Irelan' sober . . . is Irelan' . . . free.

JOXER [*stretching himself on the bed*].

Chains . . . an' . . . slaveree . . . that's a darlin' motto . . . a daaarlin' . . . motto!

BOYLE. If th' worst comes . . . to th' worse . . . I can join a . . . flyin' . . . column. . . . I done . . . me bit . . . in Easther Week . . . had no business . . . to . . . be . . . there . . . but Captain Boyle's Captain Boyle!

JOXER. Breathes there a man with soul . . . so . . . de . . . ad . . . this . . . me . . . o . . . wn, me nat . . . ive l . . . an'!

BOYLE [*subsiding into a sitting posture on the floor*]. Commandant Kelly died . . . in them . . . arms . . . Joxer. . . . Tell me Volunteer Butties . . . says he . . . that . . . I died for . . . Irelan'!

JOXER. D'jever rade Willie . . . Reilly . . . an' his . . . own . . . Colleen . . . Bawn? It's a darlin' story, a daaarlin' story!

BOYLE. I'm telling you . . . Joxer . . . th' whole worl's . . . in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis!

[CURTAIN.]

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Spreading the News (Lady Gregory)
The Plough and the Stars (Sean O'Casey)
The Glittering Gate (Lord Dunsany)

QUESTIONS ON "JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK"

1. Comment on the language of the play.

2. What is the effect of combining in one play deep tragedy and a rich humor?

3. Why does O'Casey end the play with the scene between Boyle and "Joxer"?

4. Do you find any evidence in the play of the author's attitude toward war and labor and capital?

5. What in the play might be offensive to an Irish audience?

6. Discuss the play as the work of an unschooled laboring man.

CLYDE FITCH

William Clyde Fitch was born in Elmira, New York, on May 2, 1856. In the public schools of Hartford and later at Amherst college he was eccentric almost to the degree of abnormality, but maintained an independence of spirit in the midst of the ridicule that descends upon the boy that in any way differs from the herd. When later in life his income as a playwright reached a quarter of a million dollars a year, he acquired, needless to say, the unstinted sympathy and respect of his former classmates. Disregarding his father's wish that he be an architect, he determinedly staked his fortunes on writing, for which he had shown real aptitude at Amherst. After a rather brief apprenticeship in magazine writing and newspaper reporting, he achieved his reputation overnight by the instantaneous success of *Beau Brummel,* with Richard Mansfield in the title rôle, in 1890. Between 1890 and 1910 Fitch wrote thirty-three original plays and twenty-three adaptations, and left three plays in manuscript at the time of his death, which occurred in Chalôns-sur-Marne, France, on September 4, 1910.

His most important plays are *The Climbers* (1900), *The Stubbornness of Geraldine* (1902), *The Girl With The Green Eyes* (1902), *The Truth* (1906), and *The City* (1910). Such historical plays as *Nathan Hale* (1898) and *Barbara Frietchie* (1899) attained a wide popular success, but are inferior to his plays of social life.

The production of *Beau Brummel* in 1890 is often regarded as the beginning of the modern drama in America. The influence of Ibsen and the new European school was late in reaching us, *A Doll's House* not being produced in New York till 1894. Before 1890 the native American drama was practically negligible in quality; it consisted mostly of bombastic melodrama and labored farce. The recent New York revivals of *Society* and *Ten Nights in A Barroom* offer a sad commentary on American achievement and taste in the nineteenth century: these old plays, exhumed for the ridicule of a more sophisticated generation, were about the best that the American theatre produced during a century. With Clyde Fitch came a theatre that took its place with the new European drama; in fact Fitch was the first American playwright to win an international reputation. It was he who founded the realistic American drama, who insisted on the use of American subject matter, of American manners and scene. He was the first American playwright to utilize to the fullest extent the many mechanical inventions and devices that had increased tremendously the possibilities of realistic stage pictures.

In spite of a great reputation and an unprecedented financial success, Fitch well illustrates the poet Browning's paradox of failure in success. Like Andrea del Sarto, Fitch was frustrated by his skill and almost perfect craftsmanship. He was undone by his merits: he was so intent upon getting facts and details accurate that he often neglected to interpret them; consequently the plays are often mere amusing collections of events of external interest, but lacking in treatment of the forces that dominate events. He was a photographer rather than an artist. His skill in stage direction led him to devise scenes of high theatrical effect, but of confusing irrelevancy. His unerring facility in casting led him often to construct plays around certain gifts of an actor or actress. *Captain Jinks Of The Horse Marines,* written especially for Ethel Barrymore, offered this talented actress a perfect vehicle, but another competent interpreter of the part of Madame Tretoni has never been found. His ingenuity in stagecraft led him to focus his attention almost wholly upon the minor facts of life. He was a faithful reporter of surfaces, but rarely faced the tragic issues of life in an honest and serious manner.

The Climbers, which was produced in 1901 with great success after nearly every Broadway manager had refused the play, illustrates the merits and defects of Fitch

as a playwright. "The public will never stand for the funeral stuff in the first act," was the feeling of the cautious managers, but the unusual and then daring beginning caught the public fancy at once. The first act, founded on an actual occurrence, is wickedly ironic in its keen observation of women of a certain class, so much so that it caused some resentment. Although the satire is often effective, the emotion real, the characters convincing, the play falls short of greatness. We shall remember such a melodramatic device as the confession in the dark longer than we remember the people of the play. The old-fashioned background of the snowfall, the sentimentality of certain speeches and scenes, the over-worked device of securing a happy ending by a suicide, all detract from its excellence. Although it begins with a funeral and ends with a suicide, it is still essentially a comedy of manners illustrating Fitch's inability to view life, even in its tragic aspects, in a serious and earnest manner.

THE CLIMBERS
(1900)

BY
CLYDE FITCH

CHARACTERS

RICHARD STERLING
EDWARD WARDEN
FREDERICK MASON
JOHNNY TROTTER
GODESBY
DR. STEINART
RYDER
SERVANT *at the Hermitage*
JORDAN, *butler at the Sterlings'*
LEONARD, *footman at the Sterlings'*
MASTER STERLING
SERVANTS

MRS. STERLING (*née Blanche Hunter*)
MISS HUNTER
MRS. HUNTER
JESSICA HUNTER
CLARA HUNTER
MISS GODESBY
MISS SILLERTON
TOMPSON, *Mrs. Hunter's Maid*
MARIE, *Clara Hunter's Maid*

ACT I: In late winter. *At the Hunters'.*
ACT II: The following Christmas Eve. *At the Sterlings'.*
ACT III: Christmas Day. *At the Hermitage, by the Bronx River.*
ACT IV: The day after Christmas. *At the Sterlings'.*

New York: Today.

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THE CLIMBERS

ACT I

A drawing-room at the Hunters', handsomely and artistically furnished. The woodwork and furniture are in the period of Louis XVI. The walls and furniture are covered with yellow brocade, and the curtains are of the same golden material. At the back are two large windows which give out on Fifth Avenue, opposite the Park, the trees of which are seen across the way. At Left is a double doorway, leading into the hall. At Right, opposite, is a door which leads to other rooms, and thence to other parts of the house. In the center, at back, between the two windows, is the fireplace; on the mantel are two vases and a clock in dark blue ormolu. There is a white and gold piano on the Right side of the room. The room suggests much wealth, and that it has been done by a professional decorator; the personal note of taste is lacking.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon. The shades of the windows are drawn down. There are rows and rows of camp-chairs filling the entire room. The curtain rises slowly. After a moment, JORDAN, *the butler, and* LEONARD, *a footman, enter from the Left and begin to gather together and carry out the camp-chairs. They do this with very serious faces, and take great pains to step softly and to make no noise. They enter a second time for more chairs.*

JORDAN [*whispers to* LEONARD]. When are they coming for the chairs?

LEONARD [*whispers back*]. To-night. Say, it was fine, wasn't it?

JORDAN. Grand!

[*They go out with the chairs and immediately reënter for more. They are followed in this time by a lady's maid,* TOMPSON; *she is not a young woman. As she crosses the room she stoops and picks up a faded flower which has fallen from some emblem. She goes to the window at Right, and peeps out. She turns around and looks at the others. They all speak in subdued voices.*]

TOMPSON. Jordan, what do you think — can we raise the shades now?

JORDAN. Yes, of course — after they've left the house it's all over as far as we here are concerned.

[*She raises both shades.*]

TOMPSON. Phew! what an odor of flowers!

[*She opens one of the windows a little.*]

[MARIE, *a young, pretty, French woman, enters from the Right.*]

MARIE. Will I help you?

TOMPSON. Just with this table, thank you, Marie. [*They begin to rearrange the room, putting it in its normal condition. They replace the table and put back the ornaments upon it.*] Poor Mr. Hunter, and him so fond of mince pie. I shall never forget how that man ate mince pie.

[*She sighs lugubriously and continues her labor with the room.*]

LEONARD. I hope as how it's not going to make any difference with us.

JORDAN [*pompously*]. Of course not; wasn't Mr. Hunter a millionnaire?

TOMPSON. Some millionnaires I've known turned out poor as Job's turkey in their coffins!

MARIE. What you say? You tink we shall 'avé some of madame's or ze young ladies' dresses?

TOMPSON [*hopefully*]. Perhaps.

MARIE. I 'ave already made my choice. I like ze pale pink of Mees Jessie.

LEONARD. Sh! I heard a carridge.

TOMPSON. Then they're coming back.

[MARIE *quickly goes out Right.*]

JORDAN [*to* LEONARD, *hurriedly, as he quickly goes out Left*]. Take them last two chairs!

[LEONARD, *with the chairs, follows* JORDAN *out Left.* TOMPSON *hastily puts back a last armchair to its usual position in the room and goes out Right.* MRS. HUNTER *enters Left, followed by her three daughters,* BLANCHE, JESSICA, *and* CLARA, *and* MASTER STERLING, *who is a small, attractive child, five years of age. All are in the deepest conventional mourning,* MRS. HUNTER *in widow's weeds and* CLARA *with a heavy, black chiffon veil; the* BOY *is also dressed in conventional mourning. As soon as they enter, all four women lift their veils.* MRS. HUNTER *is a well-preserved woman, with a pretty, rather foolish, and somewhat querulous face. Her figure is the latest mode.* BLANCHE STERLING, *her oldest daughter, is her antithesis,—a handsome, dignified woman, young, sincere, and showing, in her attitude to the others and in her own point of view, the warmth of a true, evenly-balanced nature.* JESSICA *is a typical second child,—nice, good, self-effacing, sympathetic, unspoiled.* CLARA *is her opposite,—spoiled, petulant, pretty, pert, and selfish.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*with a long sigh*]. Oh, I am so glad to be back home and the whole thing over without a hitch!

[*She sinks with a great sigh of relief into a big chair.*]

BLANCHE [*takes her son to* MRS. HUNTER]. Kiss grandmother good-by, and then Leonard will take you home.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by, dear. Be a good boy. Don't eat too much candy.

[*Kisses him carelessly.*]

MASTER STERLING. Good-by. [*Runs towards the door Left, shouting happily*]. Leonard! Leonard!

MRS. HUNTER [*tearfully*]. My dears, it was a great success! Everybody was there!

[*The three younger women stand and look about the room, as if it were strange to them—as if it were empty. There is a moment's silence.*]

BLANCHE [*tenderly*]. Mother, why don't you take off your bonnet?

MRS. HUNTER. Take it off for me; it *will* be a great relief.

BLANCHE. Help me, Jess.

MRS. HUNTER [*irritably*]. Yes, *do* something, Jessie. You've mortified me terribly to-day! That child hasn't shed a tear. People'll think you didn't love your father. [*The two are taking off* MRS. HUNTER'S *bonnet.* MRS. HUNTER *waits for an answer from* JESSICA; *none comes.*] I never saw any one so heartless! [*Tearful again.*] And her father adored her. *She* was one of the things we quarrelled *most* about!

[*Over* MRS. HUNTER'S *head* BLANCHE *exchanges a sympathetic look with* JESSICA *to show she understands.*]

CLARA. I'm sure *I've* cried enough. I've cried buckets.

[*She goes to* MRS. HUNTER *as* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA *take away the bonnet and veil and put them on the piano.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*kissing* CLARA]. Yes, dear, you are your mother's own child. And *you* lose the most by it, too.

[*Leaning against the side of her mother's chair, with one arm about her mother.*]

CLARA. Yes, indeed, instead of coming out next month, and having a perfectly lovely winter, I'll have to mope the whole season, and, if I don't look out, be a wallflower without ever having been a bud!

MRS. HUNTER [*half amused but feeling* CLARA'S *remark is perhaps not quite the right thing*]. Sh—

[*During* CLARA'S *speech above,* BLANCHE *has taken* JESSICA *in her arms a moment and kissed her tenderly, slowly. They rejoin* MRS. HUNTER, BLANCHE *wiping her eyes,* JESSICA *still tearless.*]

CLARA. And think of all the clothes we brought home from Paris last month!

MRS. HUNTER. My dear, don't think of clothes — think of your poor father! That street dress of mine will dye very well, and we'll give the rest to your aunt and cousins.

BLANCHE. Mother, don't you want to go upstairs?

JESSICA [*sincerely moved*]. Yes, I hate this room now.

MRS. HUNTER [*rising*]. Hate this room! When we've just had it done! Louis Kinge!

BLANCHE. Louis *Quinze,* dear! She means the associations now, mother.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, yes, but that's weak and foolish, Jessie. No, Blanche — [*Sitting again.*] — I'm too exhausted to move. Ring for tea.

[BLANCHE *rings the bell beside the mantel.*]

CLARA [*crossing to piano, forgets and starts to play a music-hall song, but* MRS. HUNTER *stops her*]. Oh, yes, tea! I'm starved!

MRS. HUNTER. Clara, darling! As if you could be hungry at such a time!

[JORDAN *enters Left.*]

BLANCHE. Tea, Jordan.

JORDAN. Yes, madam.

[*He goes out Left.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Girls, everybody in town was there! I'm sure even your father himself couldn't have complained.

BLANCHE. Mother!

MRS. HUNTER. Well, you know he always found fault with my *parties* being too mixed. He wouldn't realize I couldn't throw over all my old set when I married into his, — not that I ever acknowledged I was your father's inferior. I consider my family was just as good as his, only we were *Presbyterians!*

BLANCHE. Mother, dear, take off your gloves.

MRS. HUNTER. I thought I had. [*Crying.*] I'm so heartbroken I don't know what I'm doing.

[*Taking off her gloves.*]

[BLANCHE *and* CLARA *comfort their mother.*]

JESSICA. Here's the tea —

[JORDAN *and* LEONARD *enter with large, silver tray, with tea, cups, and thin bread-and-butter sandwiches. They place them on small tea-table which* JESSICA *arranges for them.*]

MRS. HUNTER. I'm afraid I can't touch it.

[*Taking her place behind tea-table and bitting eagerly into a sandwich.*]

JESSICA [*dryly*]. Try.

[BLANCHE *pours tea for them all. which they take in turn.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*eating*]. One thing I was furious about, — did you see the Witherspoons *here* at the house?

CLARA. *I* did.

MRS. HUNTER. The idea! When I've never called on them. They are the worst social pushers I've ever known.

[*She takes another sandwich.*]

CLARA. Trying to make people think they are on our visiting list! Using even a funeral to get in!

MRS. HUNTER. But I *was* glad the Worthings were here, and I thought it *sweet* of old Mr. Dormer to go even to the cemetery. [*Voice breaks a little.*] He never goes to balls any more, and, they say, catches cold at the slightest change of temperature.

[*She takes a third sandwich.*]

BLANCHE. A great many people loved father.

MRS. HUNTER [*irritably*]. They ought to've. It was really foolish the way he was always doing something for somebody! How good these sandwiches are!

[*Spoken very plaintively.*]

JESSICA. Shall we have to economize now, mother?

MRS. HUNTER. Of course not; how dare you suggest such an injustice to your *father,* and *before* the flowers are withered on his grave!

[*Again becoming tearful.*]

[JORDAN *enters Left with a small silver tray, heaping full of letters.*]

Has the new writing paper come?

BLANCHE [*who takes the letters and looks through them, giving some to her mother*]. Yes.

[BLANCHE *reads a letter, and passes it to* JESSICA.]

MRS. HUNTER. Is the black border broad enough? They said it was the thing.

CLARA. If you had it any broader you'd have to get white ink to write with!

MRS. HUNTER [*sweetly*]. Don't be impertinent, darling!

[*Reading another letter.*]

[*Enter* MISS RUTH HUNTER. *She is an unmarried woman between thirty and forty years of age, handsome, distinguished; an aristocrat, without any pretensions; simple, unaffected, and direct in her effort to do kindnesses where they are not absolutely undeserved. She enters the room as if she carried with her an atmosphere of pure ozone. This affects all those in it. She is dressed in deep mourning and wears a thick chiffon veil, which she removes as she enters.*]

RUTH. Oh! you're having tea!

[*Glad that they are.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*taking a second cup*]. I thought the children *ought* to.

RUTH. Of course they ought and so ought you, if you haven't.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, I've *trifled* with something.

JESSICA. Sit here, Aunt Ruth.

BLANCHE. Will you have a cup, Aunt Ruth?

RUTH. Yes, dear, I'm feeling *very* hungry.

[*Sitting on the sofa beside* JESSICA *and pressing her hand as she does so.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Hungry! *How can you!*

RUTH. Because I'm not a *hypocrite!*

MRS. HUNTER [*whimpering*]. I suppose that's a slur at me!

RUTH. If the slipper fits! But I confess I haven't eaten much for several days; I couldn't touch anything this morning, and I begin to feel exhausted; I must have food and, thank Heaven, I want it. Thank you.

[*To* BLANCHE, *taking the cup from her.*]

MRS. HUNTER. I think it's awful, Ruth, and I feel I have a right to say it — I think you owed it to my feelings to have worn a long veil; people will think you didn't love your brother.

RUTH [*dryly*]. Will they? Let them! You know as well as I do that George loathed the very idea of crêpe and all display of mourning.

MRS. HUNTER [*feeling out of her element, changes the subject*]. You stayed behind?

RUTH. Yes. I wanted to be the last there. [*Her voice chokes; she tries to control herself.*] Ah! you see my nerves are all gone to pieces. *I won't* cry any more!

MRS. HUNTER. I don't see how you could bear it — staying; but you never had any heart Ruth.

RUTH [*mechanically, biting her lips hard to keep the tears back*]. Haven't I?

MRS. HUNTER. My darling husband always felt that defect in you.

RUTH. George?

MRS. HUNTER. He resented your treatment of me, and often said so.

RUTH [*very quietly, but with determination*]. Please be careful. Don't talk to me like this about my brother, Florence — or you'll make me say something I shall be sorry for.

MRS. HUNTER. I don't care! It wore on him, the way you treated me. I put up with it for his sake, but it helped undermine his health.

RUTH. Florence, stop!

MRS. HUNTER [*in foolish anger, the resentment of years bursting out*]. I *won't* stop! I'm alone now, and the least you can do is to see that people who've fought shy of me take me up and give me my due. You've been a cruel, selfish sister-in-law, and your own brother saw and hated you for it!

BLANCHE. *Mother!*

RUTH [*outraged*]. Send your daughters out of the room; I wish to answer you alone.

MRS. HUNTER [*frightened*]. No! what you have to say to me I prefer my children to hear!

[CLARA *comes over to her mother and puts her arm about her.*]

RUTH. I can't remain quiet any longer. George — [*She almost breaks down, but she controls herself.*] This funeral is enough, with its show and worldliness! I don't believe there was a soul in the church you didn't see! Look at your handkerchief! Real grief isn't measured by the width of a black border. I'm ashamed of you, Florence! I never liked you very much, although I tried to for your husband's sake, but now I'm even more ashamed of you. My dear brother is gone, and there need be no further bond between us, but I want you to understand the true reason why, from to-day, I keep away from you. This funeral was revolting to me! — a show spectacle, a social function, and for *him* who you know *hated* the very thing. [*She stops a moment to control her tears and her anger.*] I saw the reporters there, and I heard your message to them, and I contradicted it. I begged them not to use your information, and they were gentlemen and promised me not to. You are, and always have been, a silly, frivolous woman. I don't doubt you loved your husband as much as you could any man, but it wasn't enough for me; he was worth being adored by the best and noblest woman in the world. I've stood by all these years, trying with my love and silent sympathy to be some comfort to him — but I saw the disappointment and disillusionment eat away the very *hope* of happiness out of his heart. I tried to help him by helping you in your foolish ambitions, doing what I could to give my brother's wife the social position *his name* entitled her to!

MRS. HUNTER. That's not true; I've had to fight it out all alone!

RUTH. It was not my fault if my best friends found you intolerable; *I* couldn't blame them. Well, now it's over! George is at rest, please God. You are a rich woman to do what you please. Go, and do it! and Heaven forgive you for ruining my brother's life! I'm sorry to have said all this before your children. Blanche, you know how dearly I love you, and I hope you have forgiven me by now for my opposition to your marriage.

BLANCHE. Of course I've forgiven you, but you were always unjust to Dick.

RUTH. Yes; I didn't like your husband then, and I didn't believe in him, but I like him better now. And I am going to put all my affairs in his hands. I couldn't show — surely — a better proof of confidence and liking than that: to trust him as I did — your father. I hope I shall see much of you and Jessica. As for you, Clara, I must be honest —

CLARA [*interrupting her*]. Oh, I know you've always hated me! The presents you gave the other girls were always twice as nice as I got!

MRS. HUNTER [*sympathetically*]. Come here, darling.

[CLARA *goes and puts her arms about her mother's neck.*]

RUTH. You are your mother's own child, Clara, and I never could pretend anything I didn't feel. [*She turns to* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA, *who stand side by side.*] You two are all I have left in the world of my brother. [*She kisses them, and lets the tears come, this time without struggling.*] Take pity on your old-maid aunt and come and see me, won't you, *often* — [*Trying to smile away her tears.*] And now good-by!

JESSICA AND RUTH [*taking her hands*]. Good-by.

[RUTH *looks about the room to say good-by to it; she cries and hurriedly begins pulling down her veil, and starts to go out as* JORDAN *enters Left and announces "Mr. Mason!"*]

[MRS. HUNTER *fluffs her hair a little and hopes she looks becoming.*]

[MASON *is a typical New Yorker, well built, well preserved, dignified, and good-looking, — a solid man in every sense of the word.*]

MASON [*meeting* RUTH, *shakes hands with her*]. Miss Hunter.

RUTH. I am just going, Mr. Mason.

MASON. You must stay. I sent word

to your house this morning to meet me here.

[*Shakes hands with the others.*]

RUTH. I was here all night.

MRS. HUNTER. Will you have some tea? The children were hungry.

MASON. No, thank you. [*To* BLANCHE.] Isn't your husband here?

[JORDAN, *at a signal from* MRS. HUNTER, *removes the tea things.*]

BLANCHE. No, he left us at the door when we came back.

MASON. Didn't he get a letter from me this morning asking him to meet me here?

BLANCHE. Oh, yes, he did mention a letter at breakfast, but my thoughts were away. He has been very much worried lately over his affairs; he doesn't confide in me, but I see it. I wish you could advise him, Mr. Mason.

MASON. I cannot advise your husband if he won't *ask* my advice. I don't think we'll wait for Mr. Sterling.

[*Gives chair to* MRS. HUNTER.]

MRS. HUNTER. I suppose you've come about all the horrid business. Why not just tell us how much our income is, and let all the details go. I really think the details are more than I can bear today.

MASON. That can be certainly as you wish; but I felt — as your business adviser — and besides I promised my old friend, your husband — it was my duty to let you know how matters stand with the least possible delay.

MRS. HUNTER [*beginning to break down*]. George! George!

[RUTH *looks at her, furious, and bites her lips hard.* JESSICA *is standing with her back toward them.*]

MASON. Well, then —

[*He is interrupted by* MRS. HUNTER, *who sees* JESSICA.]

MRS. HUNTER. Jess! How rude you are! Turn around this minute! [JESSICA *does not move.*] What do you mean! Excuse me, Mr. Mason! Jess! Such disrespect to your father's will! Turn around! [*Angry.*] Do you hear me?

JESSICA [*with her back still turned, her shoulders shaking, speaks in a voice broken with sobs*]. Leave me alone! Leave me alone —

[*She sits in a chair beside her and leans her arms upon its back and buries her face in her arms.*]

BLANCHE [*with her hand on her mother's arm*]. Mother! Don't worry her!

MRS. HUNTER. Go on, please, Mr. Mason, and remember, *spare us the details.* What is our income?

MASON. Mrs. Hunter, there is no income.

MRS. HUNTER [*quietly, not at all grasping what he means*]. No income! How is our money —

MASON. I am sorry to say there is *no* money.

MRS. HUNTER [*echoes weakly*]. No money?

MASON. Not a penny!

MRS. HUNTER [*realizing now what he means, cries out in a loud, hard, amazed voice*]. *What!*

BLANCHE [*with her hand on her shoulder*]. Mother!

MRS. HUNTER. I don't believe it!

RUTH [*to* MASON]. My good friend, do you mean that literally — that my brother died without leaving *any* money behind him?

MRS. HUNTER. For his wife and family?

MASON. I mean just that.

RUTH. But how?

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, *tell us the details* — every one of them! You can't imagine the shock this is to me!

MASON. Hunter sent for me two days before he died, and told me things had gone badly with him last year, but it seemed impossible to retrench his expenses.

RUTH. *Are you listening, Florence?*

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, of course I am; your brother was a very extravagant man!

MASON. This year, with his third daughter coming out, there was need of more money than ever. He was harassed nearly to death with financial worries. [RUTH *begins to cry softly.* MRS. HUNTER *gets angrier and angrier.*] And finally, in sheer desperation, and trust-

ing to the advice of the Storrings, he risked everything he had with them in the Consolidated Copper. The day after, he was taken ill. You know what happened. The Storrings, Hunter and others were ruined absolutely; the next day Hunter died.

RUTH. Poor George! Why didn't he come to me; he must have known that everything I had was his!

MASON. He was too ill when the final blow came to realize it.

MRS. HUNTER [*angry*]. But his *life insurance,*—there was a big policy in my name.

MASON. He had been obliged to let that lapse.

MRS. HUNTER. You mean I haven't even my *life* insurance?

MASON. As I said, there is nothing, except this house, and that is—

MRS. HUNTER [*rises indignantly and almost screams in angry hysterics*]. *Mortgaged,* I presume! Oh, it's insulting! It's an indignity. It's—it's—. Oh, well, it's just like my husband, there!

BLANCHE. Mother!

[RUTH *rises, and, taking* MASON'S *arm, leads him aside.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*to* BLANCHE]. Oh, don't talk to me now! You always preferred your father, and now you're punished for it! He has wilfully left your mother and sisters paupers!

BLANCHE. How can you speak like that! Surely you know father must have suffered more than we could when he realized he was leaving nothing for you.

JESSICA. Yes, and it was for us too that he lost all. It was our extravagance.

MRS. HUNTER. Hush! How dare *you* side against me, too?

RUTH. Florence—

MRS. HUNTER. Well, Ruth, what do you think of your brother now?

BLANCHE [*to her mother*]. Don't!

MASON. By whom were the arrangements for to-day made?

MRS. HUNTER. My son-in-law had most pressing business, and his friend—

BLANCHE. The friend of all of us—

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, of course, Mr. Warden saw to everything.

BLANCHE. He will be here any moment!

MASON. When he comes, will you send him on to me, please?

RUTH. Yes.

MASON. Very well. Good-by. [*Shakes hands with* BLANCHE.] I am very sorry to have been the bearer of such bad news.

MRS. HUNTER [*shaking hands with him*]. Please overlook anything I may have said; at such a moment, with the loss of all my money—and my dear husband—I don't know *what* to say!

MASON. Naturally. [*To the others.*] Good-by. [*To* RUTH, *who follows him.*] I'll come to see you in the morning. [*As they shake hands.*]

RUTH. And I can then tell you what I settle here now. [MASON *goes out Left.*] Florence, I'm very sorry—

[*Interrupted.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Oh! *You!* Sorry!

RUTH. Yes, very, very sorry,—first, that I spoke as I did just now.

MRS. HUNTER. It's too late to be sorry for that now.

RUTH. No, it isn't, and I'll prove to you I mean it. Come, we'll talk things over.

MRS. HUNTER. Go away! I don't want you to prove anything to me! [MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *sit side by side on the sofa.* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA *are in chairs near the table.* RUTH *sits beside* BLANCHE. MRS. HUNTER *has something the manner of porcupines and shows a set determination to accept nothing by way of comfort or expedient.* BLANCHE *looks hopeful and ready to take the helm for the family.* JESSICA *will back up* BLANCHE.] My happiness in this world is over. What have I to live for?

RUTH. Your children!

MRS. HUNTER. Beggars like myself!

BLANCHE. But your children will work for you.

CLARA. Work! I see myself.

RUTH. So do I.

MRS. HUNTER. My children work! Don't be absurd!

JESSICA. It is not absurd! I can cer-

tainly earn my own living somehow and so can Clara.

CLARA. Doing *what,* I should like to know! I see myself!

BLANCHE. Jess is right. I'll take care of this family — father always said I was "his own child." I'll do my best to take his place.

RUTH. I will gladly give Jessica a home.

MRS. HUNTER [*whimpers*]. You'd rob me of my children, too!

JESSICA. Thank you, Aunt Ruth, but I must stay with mother and be Blanche's right-hand man!

CLARA. I might go on the stage.

MRS. HUNTER. My dear, smart people don't any more.

CLARA. I'd like to be a sort of Anna Held.

JESSICA. I don't see why I couldn't learn typewriting, Blanche?

MRS. HUNTER. Huh! Why, you could never even learn to play the piano; I don't think you'd be much good at typewriting.

CLARA. You want to be a typewriter, because in the papers they always have an old gentleman taking them to theatres and supper! No, sir, if there is to be any "old man's darling" in this family, *I'll* be *it!*

RUTH [*dryly*]. You'll have to learn to spell correctly first!

CLARA [*superciliously*]. Humph!

JESSICA. There are lots of ways nowadays for women to earn their living.

RUTH. Yes, typewriting we will consider.

MRS. HUNTER. Never!

[*No one pays any attention to her except* CLARA, *who agrees with her.*]

RUTH. Jess, you learned enough to *teach,* didn't you?— even at that fashionable school your mother sent you to?

JESSICA. Oh, yes, I think I could teach.

MRS. HUNTER. Never!

[*Still no one pays any attention except* CLARA, *who again agrees with her.*]

CLARA. No, indeed! *I* wouldn't teach!

BLANCHE. If we only knew some nice elderly woman who wanted a companion, Jess would be a godsend.

CLARA. If she was a nice *old* lady with lots of money and delicate health, I wouldn't mind that position myself.

RUTH. Clara, you seem to take this matter as a supreme joke!

MRS. HUNTER [*with mock humility*]. May *I* speak? [*She waits. All turn to her. A moment's silence.*] May I speak?

RUTH. Yes, yes. Go on, Florence; don't you see we're listening?

MRS. HUNTER. I didn't know! I've been so completely ignored in this entire conversation. But there is one thing for the girls — the easiest possible way for them to earn their living — which you don't seem for a moment to have thought of!

[*She waits with a smile of coming triumph on her face.*]

RUTH. Nursing!

MRS. HUNTER [*disgusted*]. No!

CLARA. Manicuring?

MRS. HUNTER. *Darling!*

BLANCHE. Designing dresses and hats?

MRS. HUNTER. No!

JESSICA. Book-keeping?

MRS. HUNTER. No.

RUTH. Then what in the world is it?

MRS. HUNTER. Marriage!

CLARA. Oh, of course!

RUTH. Humph!

[JESSICA *and* BLANCHE *exchange glances.*]

MRS. HUNTER. That young Mr. Trotter would be a fine catch for Jess.

JESSICA. Who loathes him!

MRS. HUNTER. Don't be old-fashioned! He's very nice.

RUTH. A little cad, trying to get into society — nice occupation for a *man!*

JESSICA. Mother, you can't be serious.

CLARA. Why wouldn't he do for *me?*

RUTH. He *would!* The very thing!

MRS. HUNTER. We'll see darling; I think Europe is the place for you. I don't believe all the titles are gobbled up yet.

RUTH. Jess, I might get you some women friends of mine, to whom you could go mornings and answer their letters.

MRS. HUNTER. I should not allow my daughter to go in that capacity to the house of any woman who had refused

to call on her mother, which is the way most of your friends have treated me.

RUTH. Do you realize, Florence, this is a question of bread and butter, a practical suggestion of life, which has nothing whatever to do with the society columns of the daily papers?

MRS. HUNTER. I do *not* intend that my daughters shall lose their positions because their father has been — what shall we call it — criminally negligent of them.

RUTH [*rising*]. How dare you! You are to blame for it all. If you say another word injurious to my brother's memory, I'll leave this house and let you starve for all I'll do for you.

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth, please, for father's sake —

CLARA. Well, this house is ours, anyway!

BLANCHE. That is what *I've* been thinking of. The house is yours. It's huge. You don't need it. You must either give it up altogether —

MRS. HUNTER [*interrupts*]. *What! Leave it! My house! Never!*

BLANCHE. Or — let out floors to one or two friends, — bachelor friends. Mr. Mason, perhaps —

CLARA [*interrupts, rising, furious*]. Take in *boarders!*

MRS. HUNTER [*who has listened aghast, now rises in outraged dignity; she stands a moment glaring at* BLANCHE, *then speaks*]. Take — [*She chokes.*] *That* is the *last straw!*

[*And she sweeps from the room Right.*]

CLARA. Mama! Mama!

[*She goes out after her Mother.*]

[*The other three women watch the two leave the room, then turn and look at each other.*]

BLANCHE. We'll manage somehow, only I think it would be easier for us to discuss all practical matters by *ourselves.*

RUTH. And I want you to understand this, girls, — I represent your dear father; half of everything I have is yours, and you must promise me always to come to me for everything.

[STERLING *enters suddenly Left.*]

[*He is a man of thirty-eight or forty, a singularly attractive personality; he is handsome and distinguished. His hair is grayer than his years may account for and his manner betrays a nervous system overtaxed and barely under control. At the moment that he enters he is evidently laboring under some especial, and only half-concealed, nervous strain. In spite of his irritability at times with his wife, there is an undercurrent of tenderness which reveals his real love for* BLANCHE.]

STERLING. Oh, you're all here! Have I missed old Mason?

RUTH. Yes, but Blanche will tell you what he had to say. I'm going upstairs to try and pacify your mother. We mustn't forget she has a hard time ahead of her.

[*She goes out Right with* JESSICA.]

STERLING. I suppose Mason came about the will and your father's affairs?

BLANCHE. Yes, you ought to have been here.

STERLING [*irritably*]. But I couldn't — I told you I couldn't!

BLANCHE. Do you realize, dear, that you haven't been able to do *anything for me* for a long time? Lately, even I hardly ever *see* you — I stay home night after night alone.

STERLING. That's your own fault, dear; Ned Warden's always ready to take you anywhere you like.

BLANCHE [*with the ghost of a jest*]. But do you think it's quite right for me to take up all Mr. Warden's time?

STERLING. Why not, if he likes it?

BLANCHE. And don't you think people will soon talk?

STERLING. Darling! People always talk, and who cares!

BLANCHE. It's months since you showed me any sign of affection, and now when my heart is hungrier than ever for it, — you know how I loved my father, — I long for sympathy from *you,* and you haven't once thought to take me, your wife, in your arms and hold me close and comfort me.

STERLING. I'm sorry, old girl, I'm really sorry. [*Embracing her affectionately.*] And surely you know I don't love any other woman in the world but you. [*He kisses her.*] It's only because I've been terribly worried. I don't want to bother you with business, but I've been in an awful hole for money. I tried to make a big coup in Wall Street the other day and only succeeded getting in deeper, and for the last few days I've been nearly distracted.

BLANCHE. Why didn't you tell me?

STERLING. I thought I'd get out of it with this Consolidated Copper without worrying you.

BLANCHE. You were in that, too?

STERLING. How do you mean I, "too"?

BLANCHE. Mr. Mason has just told us *father* lost everything in it.

STERLING [*aghast*]. You don't mean your father hasn't left any money?

BLANCHE. Nothing.

STERLING [*forgetting everything but what this means to him*]. Nothing! But I was counting on your share to save me! What did the damned old fool mean?

BLANCHE. Dick!

STERLING. Forgive me, I didn't mean to say that.

BLANCHE. Oh, *who are you! What* are you! You are not the man I thought when I married you! Every day something new happens to frighten me, to threaten my love for you!

STERLING. No, no, don't say that, old girl.

[*He tries to take her hand.*]

BLANCHE. What right have you to criticise my father, to curse him — and to-day!

STERLING. I don't know what I'm saying, Blanche. Try to forgive me. I wouldn't have thought of such a thing as his money to-day if it wasn't the only thing that can save me from — disgrace.

[*His voice sinking almost to a whisper and the man himself sinking into a chair.*]

BLANCHE. Disgrace! How? What disgrace? [*Going to him.*]

STERLING. I can't explain it; you wouldn't understand.

BLANCHE. You must explain it! *Your* disgrace is *mine.*

STERLING [*alarmed at having said so much, tries to retract a little*]. Disgrace was too strong a word — I didn't mean that. I'm in trouble. I'm in trouble. Good God, can't you see it? And if you love me, why don't you leave me alone?

BLANCHE. How can I go on loving you without your confidence? — without ever being suffered to give you any sympathy? Doll wives are out of fashion, and even if they weren't, I could never be one.

STERLING [*laughing*]. My dear, I'd never accuse you of being stuffed with sawdust.

BLANCHE. Oh, and now you joke about it. Take care, Dick.

STERLING. What's this, a threat?

BLANCHE. Yes, if you like to call it that. You've been putting me more and more completely out of your life; take care that I don't finish your work and go the last step.

STERLING [*seizing her roughly by the wrist*]. The last step! What do you mean by that? [*Holding her hand more roughly.*] *You dare* to be unfaithful to me!

BLANCHE. What! You could think I meant that! Ugh! How could you?

STERLING. Well, what did you mean then? Eh?

[*Pulling her up close to him, her face close to his. She realizes first by the odor, then by a searching look at his face, that he is partly under the influence of liquor.*]

BLANCHE [*with pathetic shame*]. Let me go! I see what's the matter with you, but the reason is no excuse; you've been drinking.

STERLING [*dropping her hand*]. Ugh! The usual whimper of a woman!

[RUTH *reënters Right.*]

RUTH. Well, Blanche, dear, your mother's in a calmer frame of mind, and I must go. Dick, can you lunch with me to-morrow?

STERLING [*hesitating, not caring about it.*] Er — to-morrow? — er —

RUTH. Oh, only for business. I must have a new business man now to do all that *he* did for me, and I'm going to try to make up to you for not having been always your — *best* friend, by putting my affairs in *your* hands.

BLANCHE [*serious, uneasy, almost frightened*]. Aunt Ruth —

RUTH. What, dear?

BLANCHE. Nothing.

[*She gives* STERLING *a searching, steady look and keeps her eyes upon him, trying to read his real self.*]

RUTH [*continuing to* STERLING]. Mr. Mason is coming to me in the morning, and if you will lunch with me at one, I will then be able to give all the papers over to you.

[STERLING, *who up to this time has been almost dumbfounded by this sudden good fortune, now collects himself, and speaks delightedly but with sufficient reserve of his feelings.* BLANCHE *does not take her eyes from* STERLING'S *face.*]

STERLING. Aunt Ruth, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and I will do my best.

BLANCHE [*quickly*]. Promise her, Dick, before me — give her your word of honor — you will be faithful to Aunt Ruth's trust.

[*He answers* BLANCHE'S *look steadily with a hard gaze of his own.*]

RUTH. His acceptance of my trust is equal to that, Blanche.

BLANCHE. It is of course, isn't it, Dick?

STERLING. Of course.

[BLANCHE *is not content, but has to satisfy herself with this.*]

RUTH. To-morrow at one, then.

[*She starts to go.*]

[JORDAN *enters Left.*]

JORDAN. Mr. Warden.

RUTH. I can't wait. Good-by.

[*She goes out Left.*]

BLANCHE. We will see Mr. Warden.

JORDAN. Yes, madam.

[*He goes out Left.*]

STERLING. Blanche, go to your mother and ask her to see Ned to thank him. I want a minute's talk with him if you don't mind.

BLANCHE [*pathetically*]. What difference does it make, Dick, if I *do* mind?

STERLING. Don't say that, old girl, and don't think it.

BLANCHE. Dick, you *are* honest, aren't you?

STERLING [*without flinching*]. What a question, Blanche!

[JORDAN *enters Left announcing "Mr. Warden."* WARDEN *enters, and* JORDAN *goes out.*]

[EDWARD WARDEN, *though in reality scarcely younger than* STERLING, *looks at least ten years his junior. He is good-looking, practical, a reasoning being, and self-controlled. He is a thorough American, with the fresh and strong ideals of his race, and with the feeling of romance alive in the bottom of his heart.*]

STERLING [*in enormous relief, greets him joyfully*]. Ned, what do you think! The greatest news going!

BLANCHE. Dick!

STERLING. Excuse me, Blanche, I forgot; but Ned will know how I can't help being glad.

[WARDEN *goes to* MRS. STERLING.]

BLANCHE [*shaking* NED'S *hand*]. And Mr. Warden knows nothing could make me *"glad"* to-day. Thank you for all your kindness —

WARDEN. Don't thank me; it was nothing.

BLANCHE. Yes, please let me thank you all I can; it won't be half what I feel, but I want to know that you know even my silence is full of gratitude for all you've done for my mother, sisters, and me.

STERLING. Yes, we're all immensely indebted to you, Ned, old man.

BLANCHE. I will tell mother. I know she wants to see you.

[*She goes out Right.*]

STERLING [*speaking with suppressed excitement and uncontrollable gladness, unable to keep it back any longer*]. Ned, my wife's aunt, Miss Hunter, has put all her business in my hands.

WARDEN. Made you her agent?

STERLING. Yes! What a godsend! Hunter didn't leave a cent.

[*A moment's pause of astonishment.*]

WARDEN. What do you mean?

STERLING. It seems he's been losing for a long time. Everything he had he lost in the copper crash.

WARDEN. But this is awful! What will Mrs. Hunter and her two young daughters do?

STERLING. I don't know. I hadn't thought of that.

WARDEN. You'll have to think of it.

STERLING. I?

WARDEN. Of course you'll have to help them.

STERLING. I can't! Look here, I didn't tell you the truth about my affairs last week, when I struck you for that loan.

WARDEN. You don't mean to say you weren't straight with me?

STERLING. Oh, I only didn't want to frighten you till I'd got the money; if you had made me the loan, I'd have owned up afterwards all right enough.

WARDEN. Owned up what?

STERLING. That I told you a pack of lies! — that I haven't any security! — that I haven't anything but *debts*.

WARDEN [*strongly*]. Good things to borrow on! Look here, Dick, how long have we been friends?

STERLING. Since that day at boarding school when you took a licking for something I did.

WARDEN. What I mean is we were pals at school, chums at college, stanch friends for twenty years.

STERLING. Hell! Are we as old as all that?

WARDEN. Inseparable friends till the last two years.

[STERLING'S *eyes shift.*]

STERLING. I've been overworked lately, and everything has gone wrong!

WARDEN [*comes up to him, and speaks firmly but still friendly*]. You *yourself* have *gone wrong!*

STERLING [*on the defensive*]. What do you mean?

WARDEN. Why did you take your business out of my hands?

STERLING. The law didn't pay me enough. I thought I'd try a little amateur stockbroking.

[*Smiling insincerely.*]

WARDEN. You didn't want *me to know* what you were doing!

STERLING. Rats!

WARDEN. You didn't want me to know what funds — *whose* funds — you were using — *mis*using.

STERLING [*ugly*]. What!

WARDEN. Whose money you were gambling with!

STERLING. Have you been spying on me?

WARDEN. Your *wife's* money!

STERLING. Well, she's *my* wife, and you don't know what you're talking about!

[*He turns from him and picks up a book from the table upside down and pretends to read it.*]

WARDEN. You stole from me once when you were a boy!

STERLING. No! I didn't!

[*Throwing the book down.*]

WARDEN. You lie! Do you hear me? *You lie!* [*He waits a second.* STERLING *does nothing.*] I was never sure till to-day! I fought against ever thinking it, believing my suspicions were an injustice to you, but little things were always disappearing out of my rooms — finally, even money. Lately, that old suspicion has come back with a fuller force, and to-day it became a certainty.

STERLING. How to-day?

WARDEN. Because if it weren't true, you'd have knocked me down just now when I called you first a thief and *twice* a liar!

[*He stands squarely facing him.* STERLING *stands facing him also, surprised, taken off his guard.*]

STERLING. Oh, come, you're joking! [WARDEN *makes an angry exclamation.*] Why're you telling me all this now?

WARDEN. Because I want you to be careful. I want you to know some one is watching you! Some one who knows what you've come to! Some one who knows you can't resist temptation! Some one who knows money not yours *has* stuck to your fingers!

STERLING. You mind your own business.

WARDEN. I'll mind *yours* if it's necessary to protect people who are dear to me!

[STERLING *looks at him with a sudden suspicion.*]

STERLING [*insinuatingly*]. I didn't know you were particularly attached to Mrs. Hunter.

WARDEN. I'm not.

STERLING. Or to her two unmarried daughters!

WARDEN. Nor am I!

STERLING [*with whispered intensity*]. By God, if you are in love with my wife!

WARDEN. If you thought that out loud, I'd knock you down!

STERLING. Huh! you talk as if you thought I were a coward!

WARDEN. No, not a *physical* coward — I've seen you do too many plucky things — but a *moral* coward — yes, you are one!

[*Straight to him, standing close and looking him squarely in the eyes.*]

STERLING [*wavering*]. Ah, you're too damned preachy!

[MRS. HUNTER *enters Right with* CLARA. MRS. HUNTER *shakes hands with* WARDEN *silently, happy in the feeling that she is in great affliction, and satisfied with the appearance and impression she is making. She carries her handkerchief, with its black border, ready in her hand.* CLARA *has silently shaken hands with* WARDEN, *after her mother. She afterwards goes to* STERLING *and hands him several of the letters of condolence. She then goes to the window at Left, pulling aside the curtain, and stands looking out, rather bored, wishing she could go out and take a walk.*]

MRS. HUNTER. We will never forget your kindness. Will the evening papers have anything in, do you think?

WARDEN. No, not before morning.

MRS. HUNTER [*sighs*]. Every one was there.

STERLING. Where's Blanche?

MRS. HUNTER. Upstairs. She said she was going after Aunt Ruth.

STERLING [*frightened*]. After Aunt Ruth? [*Strongly.*] What for?

MRS. HUNTER I don't know. [*Whimpering.*] I'm not considered in the family any longer!

STERLING. I shall stop and take her home.

[JORDAN *enters.*]

JORDAN. Will you see visitors, madam?

STERLING. No.

[*He goes out Right.*]

MRS. HUNTER. "No"? Yes, we will! I need to see some one, or I shall break down. Go upstairs, Clara!

CLARA. No, *why* need I?

MRS. HUNTER. You're not out yet.

CLARA. I don't care! At this rate I'll never get "out." Who are they, Jordan?

JORDAN. Miss Sillerton, Miss Godesby, and Mr. Trotter, miss.

WARDEN. I must go, Mrs. Hunter.

MRS. HUNTER [*relieved*]. So sorry. Could you go straight to Mr. Mason? He wishes to see you?

[*Shaking hands.*]

WARDEN. Certainly.

MRS. HUNTER. Thank you.

[WARDEN *inclines his head to* CLARA.]

CLARA [*lightly*]. Good-by!

[WARDEN *goes out Left.*]

MRS. HUNTER. I don't think we ought to receive Mr. Trotter.

CLARA. Pshaw! why not? If there's really any idea of my mar —

[*She stops short, silenced by a look from her mother and an indication toward* JORDAN.]

MRS. HUNTER. Show them up, Jordan. [JORDAN *bows and goes out.*] How do I look, dear?

[*Arranges her handkerchief.*]

CLARA [*looking in the mirror*]. How do I?

MRS. HUNTER [*with her back to* CLARA]. I asked you first how *I* looked!

CLARA [*not observing*]. Oh, you're all right, how am I?

MRS. HUNTER [*not looking at* CLARA]. Charming! We'll go upstairs and come

down again; I don't think it nice to be found here as if we were expecting visitors. [*They go out Right.*]

[JORDAN *steps into the room to announce the visitors, and seeing no one there, bows as the three pass him.*]

JORDAN. The ladies will be down at once. [*He goes out Right.*]

[*The three turn, looking about the room with curiosity, as if the funeral might have made some difference in the house.*

[MISS SILLERTON *is a handsome, attractive woman, most fashionably dressed and perfectly conventional in character and intelligence.* MISS GODESBY *is a little slow, more assertive, sharper of tongue, more acutely intelligent, and equally smartly dressed. She has still a remnant of real, sincere feeling buried under a cynical mask which her life in a fast set has developed for her self-preservation.* TROTTER *is a foolish young person, meaning well enough according to his lights, which are not of the biggest and brightest.*]

TROTTER. Classy house altogether!

MISS SILLERTON. Mrs. Hunter went to the most expensive decorator in town, and told him, no matter what it cost, to go ahead and do his *worst!*

[*They all laugh and seat themselves comfortably.*]

TROTTER. Say! The youngest daughter is a good looker — very classy.

MISS SILLERTON. That's the one we told you about, the one we want you to marry.

MISS GODESBY. Yes, with your money and her cleverness, she'll rubber neck you into the smartest push in town!

TROTTER. You've promised I shall know the whole classy lot before spring.

MISS GODESBY. So you will if you do as we tell you. But you mustn't let society see that you *know* you're getting in; nothing pleases society so much as to think you're a blatant idiot. It makes everybody feel you're their equal — that's why you get in.

TROTTER. I've got a coach and can drive four-in-hand. I've an automobile drag, and the biggest private yacht in the world building. I'm going to have the most expensive house in Long Island, where the oysters come from, and I've bought a lot in Newport twice as big as the swellest fellow's there. I've got a house in London and a flat in Paris, and I make money fly. I think I ought to be a cinch as a classy success.

MISS GODESBY. Don't be a yap; flag Clara Hunter and you're all right!

MISS SILLERTON. Her father's position was the best in this country!

TROTTER. But he's dead. [*Sitting.*]

MISS GODESBY. A good thing for you, for he would never have stood for you!

TROTTER. He'd have had to — or do without me as a son-in-law — I wouldn't marry the Venus of Milo if her father didn't think I was good enough. I'm no Dodo bird!

MISS GODESBY. It's up to you now, Trotter! Go in and win.

[*Enter* TOMPSON *Right; a decided change takes place in all their manners.*]

TOMPSON. Madam will be down at once, miss.

MISS SILLERTON. Thank you.

[TOMPSON *goes out Right.*]

MISS GODESBY. Only stay a minute or two, Trotty — we're doing our best for you, but we must look out for ourselves, too, and we've come here to-day on business.

MISS SILLERTON. How'll we ever get the subject on to clothes?

MISS GODESBY. Humph! Do you think you can talk five minutes with Mrs. Hunter and not hit that topic? It's a bull's-eye!

TROTTER. I don't see where I'm going to come into this classy conversation.

MISS GODESBY. You see, Trotty, they brought over piles of clothes from Europe this year, and we want to get hold of them before any one else has a chance — get 'em cheap before they have an idea anybody else'll buy them.

TROTTER. Who buy what?

Miss Sillerton. *We* — buy their winter clothes.

Trotter. For Heaven's sake!

Miss Godesby. Laugh, you silly! I heard the Reed girls planning to come to-morrow. They didn't dare come to-day. Those girls haven't any sand! They're always getting left.

Trotter. You two *are* Dodo birds!

Miss Godesby. I say, Eleanor, you're such a lobster about prices and Mrs. Hunter's no idiot, we'd better agree on some sort of a signal! Listen! if you like a gown very much, ask the price then say to me, "My dear, your hat pin is coming out." And if I think it's a bargain, I'll say, "So it is, thank you; won't you put it in for me?" And if I think Mrs. Hunter's trying to stick you, I'll say "No, it isn't; it's always like that."

Miss Sillerton. All right.

[Mrs. Hunter *and* Clara *enter Right. The manner of* Miss Sillerton *and* Miss Godesby *changes immediately. They speak with rather subdued voices, in the tone of conventional sympathy which is usually adopted on such occasions.* Mrs. Hunter *also assumes the manner of a martyr to grief.* Clara *is casual and hard.*]

Miss Sillerton [*shakes hands with* Mrs. Hunter]. Dear Mrs. Hunter.

[*She kisses her.*]

Clara, dear.

[*She kisses her.*]

[Miss Godesby *goes to* Mrs. Hunter *and shakes hands while* Miss Sillerton *crosses to* Clara; *Trotter shakes hands with* Mrs. Hunter *as* Miss Godesby *goes to* Clara.]

Trotter. I hope you don't think my coming an intrusion.

Mrs. Hunter. Not at all.

Miss Godesby. I felt we must stop in for a few minutes to give you our love and sympathy and find out how you are.

Mrs. Hunter. I've been through a terrible strain. My loss is even greater than I could ever possibly imagine.

Clara [*who misinterprets her mother's remark*]. Yes, indeed, I should say it was!

[Mrs. Hunter *stops her with a warning look.*]

Mrs. Hunter. But every one has been most kind. *Lady Hopeton* sent me a beautiful long letter to-day.

Miss Godesby. And I'm glad to find you looking so well. Black *suits* you!

[*She exchanges a knowing glance with* Miss Sillerton.]

Mrs. Hunter. Oh, I don't know, Julia; I've always thought black very *trying* for me.

Miss Godesby. Oh, *no! every one's* saying *just* the reverse!

Mrs. Hunter. But — I suppose clothes don't interest you, Mr. Trotter?

Trotter. Oh, yes, they do, out of sight!

Clara. Well, I wish you could have seen the beautiful things we brought over with us!

Miss Sillerton. Julia and I were just speaking about it, and pitying you from the bottom of our hearts.

[Miss Sillerton *and* Miss Godesby *again exchange surreptitious glances.*]

Mrs. Hunter. Every one's been most kind. [*There is an awkward pause for a moment, no one knowing quite what to say. Both* Miss Godesby *and* Miss Sillerton *have started the conversation in the direction of clothing and are fearful of the topic being changed. As the pause becomes embarrassing, they look helplessly from one to the other, and all five, suddenly and at once, make an ineffectual effort to say something — or nothing. Out of the general confusion* Mrs. Hunter *comes to the front, mistress of the situation.*] Are you going to stay in New York this winter, Mr. Trotter?

Trotter. Yes, I'm negotiating for one of the biggest classy building plots on upper Fifth Avenue.

Clara [*to* Miss Godesby]. I saw in the papers you were at the dance last night.

[Miss Godesby *nods and motions surreptitiously to* Trotter *to go. He, however, doesn't understand.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*with interest again in life*]. Oh, *were you?* What did you wear?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, dowdy old things. I haven't bought my winter frocks yet.

[*She repeats this casually as if to herself.* MISS SILLERTON motions to TROTTER *to go, but he has forgotten and still doesn't understand.*]

TROTTER. What?

MISS GODESBY. You warned us not to let you forget your engagement!

TROTTER. What engagement?

MISS SILLERTON. How do we know! we only know you said you *had* to go!

TROTTER. Never said so! Oh! [*As it dawns upon him.*] Oh, yes! of course. [*He rises.*] Very sorry — must be off. Only dropped in — er — that is, came in to express my respectful sympathy.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. HUNTER.]

MRS. HUNTER [*who rises*]. I hope you will come and see us again.

CLARA. Do! It'll be a godsend! We'll be dull as ditchwater here this winter!

TROTTER. I shall be delighted to call again. Good-by. [*He bows to Clara. In his embarrassment he starts to shake hands all over again, but, realizing his mistake, laughs nervously.*] Oh, I have already.

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by, Trotter.

MISS GODESBY. Don't forget we're booked with you at Sherry's.

TROTTER. Whose treat?

MISS GODESBY. Oh! *Yours,* of course —

TROTTER. I say, why can't I stay? I won't interfere.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, do stay, Mr. Trotter!

MISS GODESBY. Oh, do stay!

[*Suggesting by her tone that he mustn't dare to remain.*]

CLARA. Good!

[TROTTER *remains, and they all settle themselves again for a long stay.*]

MRS. HUNTER. By the way, you were speaking just now of your winter frocks. It occurs to me — of course I don't know as I really want to dispose of them, but — er —

[*She hesitates purposely.*]

MISS GODESBY. Oh, *would* you? [*Rising, she takes a chair nearer to* MRS. HUNTER.] You *dear* thing!

MRS. HUNTER. The dresses are no use to us now, and when *we're* out of mourning — *they'll* be out of style. You could wear Jess' things perfectly, Julia.

MISS SILLERTON. And even something of yours could be made over for us.

MRS. HUNTER. But I'm so much older than you!

MISS SILLERTON [*thoughtlessly*]. Yes, but you never dress appropriately to your age.

CLARA [*laughing delightedly*]. That's pretty good!

MISS SILLERTON [*saves herself*]. You know what I mean, you always *look so youthful,* you *can't* dress any older.

MRS. HUNTER [*rising*]. Clara, dear, go upstairs and have Tompson bring down my Worth dress and Jess' Doucet and your Paquin. [*She goes with* CLARA *to the door, Right, and then whispers to her.*] If you remember, don't tell what we paid — we ought to get nearly double out of these girls — and warn Tompson not to be surprised at anything she hears.

[MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *exchange glances.* CLARA *goes out Right.*]

MRS. HUNTER. It seems as if I had no further interest in clothes, anyway.

MISS GODESBY. Don't say that. Every one I've seen this afternoon is wildly enthusiastic over your mourning.

MRS. HUNTER. Well, I went straight to Madame O'Hoolihan and gave her carte blank!

MISS GODESBY. I wouldn't like to be the ice man when your bill comes in! — and clothes abroad are so much cheaper.

MRS. HUNTER [*thoughtlessly*]. Oh, *half!*

MISS GODESBY [*quickly*]. You see you'll be doing us a really great favor letting us have some of your things!

MRS. HUNTER [*realizing her nearly fatal error*]. Oh! Oh, yes — but — er — I must say that *we* found prices while in Paris *this year* rather *atrocious!*

[CLARA *reënters Right.*]

CLARA [*sighs*]. O dear! It breaks my heart not to wear my ball dress, my dear Julia; it was designed specially for me. I told Marie to put it on, mama; my clothes fit her perfectly, and I thought it would show so much better what it is.

MRS. HUNTER. Here they are.

[*Rises as* TOMPSON *enters Right.*]

TOMPSON. Mrs. Hunter's reception gown. [*Displaying it.*]

CLARA. Oh, this *is* a beauty!

[*She takes the costume and drapes it over a chair.* MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *come closer to examine.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Tompson.— [*Taking her to one side, whispers.*] — I forget; do you remember what I paid for this dress?

TOMPSON [*whispers back*]. One hundred and sixty dollars, madam.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, yes. Don't say anything. [*Returning to the others.*] Do you like it?

MISS SILLERTON. Perfectly lovely!

MISS GODESBY. Immensely. It's great! [*At the same time.*]

MRS. HUNTER [*hesitates*]. I forget just what I paid for it, but I believe it was two hundred dollars.

[CLARA *half exclaims in astonishment, but on being pinched surreptitiously on the arm by* MRS. HUNTER *she grasps the situation and starts in to do her share.*]

CLARA. Oh, no, mama! I'm sure it was more than that!

MRS. HUNTER. Well, perhaps it was two — twenty or two — twenty-five.

TROTTER. That's cheap, isn't it?

MISS GODESBY. Shut up.

[TOMPSON'S *face is always a perfect blank, showing no expression of surprise; she has lived with* MRS. HUNTER *for many years and "knows her business."*]

MISS GODESBY [*in a very different tone of voice, influenced by the big price*]. Of course, I see it's made of the best material. But it isn't my color.

MRS. HUNTER. It's the very latest shade.

MISS GODESBY. Yes, I know; but I think as you said a little while ago, perhaps it is a trifle too old for me.

MRS. HUNTER. I might let you have it for a little less; say one hundred and eighty.

MISS GODESBY. Thank you very much. I'll think it over.

MISS SILLERTON. What's the other?

CLARA. This is a dinner dress of Jess'.

[*Holding it up to her own waist.*]

MISS SILLERTON. [*Carried away by the dress*]. Oh, lovely, — perfectly charming,— an adorable gown!

[MISS GODESBY *pulls her arm and tries to make her less enthusiastic.*]

MISS GODESBY [*to* CLARA *and* MRS. HUNTER]. Excuse me.

[*She takes* MISS SILLERTON *to one side and whispers in her ear.*]

MISS SILLERTON [*aloud*]. I can't help it. I'm crazy about the dress!

[*Meanwhile* MRS. HUNTER *and* TOMPSON *have whispered together.*]

MRS. HUNTER. They said themselves this was the most successful frock they turned out this autumn.

MISS SILLERTON. And how much is *this* one?

MRS. HUNTER [*very quickly, trying not to speak consciously*]. This was two hundred and seventy-five.

[CLARA *bites her lips in surprise and winks visibly to* TOMPSON, *who gives no sign and is otherwise imperturbable.*]

MISS SILLERTON [*to* MISS GODESBY, *looking hard at her*]. My dear, your hat pin is coming out!

MISS GODESBY [*looking hard at her*]. No, it isn't; it's always like that.

MISS SILLERTON [*going closer to her, whispers*]. Which does that mean? I forget!

MISS GODESBY. It's a *gouge!*

MISS SILLERTON. I can't help it; I can't resist.

MRS. HUNTER [*whispers to* CLARA]. She's going to take it; I wish I'd asked more.

MISS SILLERTON. Mrs. Hunter, I'll *take* the dinner dress! I'm crazy about it!

MRS. HUNTER. I'm glad to have you

have it; I'm glad to be able to do you, in a way, a favor.

[MARIE *at this moment enters dressed in the most exquisite ball dress of the very latest fashion and looks extremely lovely.*]

CLARA. Here's mine! I could cry to think I'll never wear it.

MARIE. *Voilà,* madame!

[*A short silence, while the women sit down and drink in the gown.*]

MISS SILLERTON [*in a subdued voice of awed admiration*]. Beautiful!

MISS GODESBY. Great!

TROTTER [*to* MISS GODESBY]. *I'm* stuck on the *girl;* introduce me! She's out of sight!

[MRS. HUNTER *sighs long and loud, —a sigh of appreciation and admiration.* MARIE *stands in the center of the stage facing the audience.*]

MISS GODESBY. May we see her back?

CLARA. Her *entire* back, if she turns around!

MRS. HUNTER. Turn around, Marie.

MARIE. *Oui,* madame.

[*She turns her back — the dress is cut extremely in the back.*]

MISS SILLERTON. Oh!

MISS GODESBY. Rather!

MRS. HUNTER. The way everything is made this year.

MISS GODESBY. I'm afraid my back is rather full of bones.

CLARA. They told us in Paris, bones were coming in! [*She takes a large American beauty rose from a vase on the piano and slips it down* MARIE'S *back so that the dress seems much less décolleté.*] There, never too late to mend!

MISS GODESBY. How much is this one?

[MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *examine the dress.*]

CLARA [*whispers to* MRS. HUNTER]. You paid two hundred for it!

MRS. HUNTER. Three hundred dollars. It is really superb.

MISS SILLERTON [*pulling* MISS GODESBY *around quickly*]. My dear, your hat pin is coming out!

MISS GODESBY. Don't be absurd!

MISS SILLERTON. What?

MISS GODESBY. It's my turn, sit down; you got the last! You won't mind my being frank, Mrs. Hunter?

MRS. HUNTER [*on the defensive*]. Certainly not.

MISS GODESBY. I think the price is too much.

TROTTER. Oh, go on, pay it!

MISS GODESBY. Will you sign the check?

TROTTER. *Excuse me!*

CLARA. I'd give twice that if only I could wear it to one ball this winter!

MRS. HUNTER. I wouldn't part with it for a penny less. I couldn't afford to.

[*The manners and voices of all become a little strained.*]

MISS GODESBY. That is of course your affair.

MRS. HUNTER [*politely*]. We needn't keep Marie any longer at any rate, need we? You can go, Marie, and you too, Tompson.

[CLARA *and* MRS. HUNTER *help place the other dresses on* TOMPSON'S *arms.*]

MISS SILLERTON [*to* MISS GODESBY, *on the opposite side of the room, in a lowered voice*]. I'll take it; I'm willing to pay that.

MISS GODESBY. Don't you dare interfere! I want the gown, but I know she'll come down,— if she doesn't, I'll make a bluff at going. Then if she sticks to her price, I'll come back and pay it.

[*They turn to* MRS. HUNTER.]

MISS SILLERTON. Oh, Mrs. Hunter, may I see my dress just one more minute?

MRS. HUNTER. Certainly.

[*She and* CLARA *come back with the dress.*]

MARIE [*to* TOMPSON *by the door at Right*]. *Vite!* Come! Come! Jordan 'ave stole ze photograph machine of Mees Clara, and he make now one pigsher of me in ze dress!

[*Smiling mischievously, delighted, she goes out Right.*]

MISS SILLERTON. Thank you.

[*She leaves her dress.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Take this too, Tompson.

TOMPSON. Yes, madam.

[MRS. HUNTER *speaks to* TOMPSON, *aside, and* CLARA, *near them, watches the two visitors out of the corner of her eye.*]

MISS GODESBY [*aside to* MISS SILLERTON]. I'll leave my muff; that'll be a good excuse to come back.

TROTTER [*also in a lowered voice to* MISS GODESBY]. Dodo!

[TOMPSON *goes out Right.* MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *come back.*]

MISS GODESBY. You really couldn't take less than three hundred?

MRS. HUNTER. I wish I could if only for your own sake; but I really couldn't in justice to myself.

MISS GODESBY. I'm very sorry — and I'm afraid we must be going now.

MRS. HUNTER [*not believing they will go*]. Oh, must you? Well, it was very kind of you to come.

[MISS GODESBY *leaves her muff upon the table at the Left.*]

MISS SILLERTON [*shakes hands with* MRS. HUNTER]. Good-by.

[*She goes on to* CLARA. MISS GODESBY *comes to shake hands with* MRS. HUNTER.]

MRS. HUNTER. I think you're making a mistake not to take the dress, Julia dear.

MISS GODESBY. Perhaps, but I really can't go more than two hundred and fifty.

[MRS. HUNTER *looks surreptitiously at* CLARA, *who slyly shakes her head to her mother.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, quite impossible!

MISS GODESBY. Good-by.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by.

MISS GODESBY. Good-by, Clara.

MRS. HUNTER [*frightened*]. Would you like to see the dress off?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, my dear, it was as *off* as I would ever like to see it. Good-by.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by. [MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *get to doorway Left.*] You *won't* take it?

MISS GODESBY. *Can't!* Good-by.

CLARA [*dryly*]. You're forgetting your muff!

TROTTER. Rubber!

MISS GODESBY [*coming back for it*]. How stupid!

[*She goes away to the door again in silence which is full of suspense for all of them. As she reaches the door* MRS. HUNTER *speaks.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Look here, Julia, don't say another word; you shall have the dress for two hundred and fifty.

MISS GODESBY [*rushing back, followed by all the others*]. You dear! I'm afraid you think I've been rather nasty!

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, no, of course business is business, and I'd *rather you* had it than see it wasted on some of our other friends who'd be sights in it!

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by. [*Kisses her this time.*] I haven't said half I feel; you've been in my thoughts all these last few days.

MRS. HUNTER. Thank you, dear.

[*Kisses her.*]

MISS GODESBY. Shall we send around for the dresses in the morning?

MRS. HUNTER. Or I'll send them.

MISS GODESBY. No, we won't trouble you.

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by!

MRS. HUNTER AND CLARA. Good-by.

[MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *go out Left, followed by* TROTTER, *who has joined in all the good-bys, and upon whom* CLARA *has more or less continuously kept her "weather eye."*]

MRS. HUNTER. I'm perfectly sure if I'd stuck to three hundred, Julia Godesby would have sent around when she got home and paid it!

CLARA. I'm glad you didn't run the risk though, for we'll need every cent we can get now.

[*She runs her fingers rapidly over the piano keys.* BLANCHE *reënters Right.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Why, I thought you'd gone long ago.

BLANCHE. Jess begged me to stay with her. Try to understand her, mother; I

think she will miss father more than any of us.

[JORDAN *enters Left.*]

JORDAN. Mr. Warden has come back, madam.

[WARDEN *enters Left.*]

WARDEN. Forgive my intruding so soon again, but did Mr. Mason leave a letter case of Mr. Hunter's here?

[BLANCHE *begins looking for the case.*]

MRS. HUNTER. I haven't seen it; I'll ask the servants to look. Excuse me, I'm quite tired out; we've been receiving a long list of condolence.

[*She goes out, Right, with* CLARA, *who links her arm in her mother's.*]

BLANCHE [*finding the case, which has fallen beneath the table*]. Here it is. Dear old pocket-book—

[*Her voice breaks on the last word, and turning her face away to hide her tears, she hands him the well-worn letter case.*]

WARDEN. Mrs. Sterling, I'm glad they left us alone, because Mr. Mason said he hadn't been able to manage it—to see you alone—and yet he wanted *you only* to examine these. They are private papers of Mr. Hunter; he thought they ought not to be destroyed without being read, and yet *he* hesitated to read them. We thought that duty devolved best upon *you.* [*He hands back the letter case.*] Shall I wait and take back the case to Mr. Mason with the papers you wish him to have?

BLANCHE. Oh, no, I will send them; I mustn't keep you while I read them. I'm always taking more of your time than I ought.

WARDEN [*speaks with sincerity, but without any suggestion of love-making*]. But never as much as I want to give you! Don't forget, Mrs. Sterling, what you promised me at your wedding,—that your husband's best man should be your best friend.

BLANCHE. And nobody knows what it means to a woman, even a happily married woman like me—[*This is spoken with a slight effort, as if she is persuading herself that she is a happily married woman.*]—to have an honest friend like you. It's those people who have failed that say there is no such thing as a platonic friendship.

WARDEN. We'll prove them wrong.

BLANCHE. We will. Good-by, and thank you.

WARDEN. And thank *you!* [*Starting to go, he turns.*] Shall I bring that Russian pianist around to play for you some day next week?

BLANCHE. Do—I want some music.

WARDEN. Only let me know what day. [*He goes out Left.* BLANCHE *sits by the table and opens the case. She looks first at a memoranda and reads what is on the outside.*] A business memoranda. Lists of bonds. [*She opens and looks at the next paper only a second, and then closes it.*] This, Mr. Mason will understand better than I. [*She puts it back in the pocket case. She finds a photograph in the case.*] My picture!—[*She looks for others, but finds none.*]—and *only* mine! Oh, father! . . . [*She wipes away tears from her eyes so as to see the picture, which is an old one.*] Father, I returned *your* love. [*She reads on the back of photograph.*] "Blanche, my darling daughter, at fourteen years of age!" That's mine! that's my own! [*And she puts the picture away separately. She takes up a small packet of very old love-letters tied with faded old pink tape.*] Old letters from mother; they must be her love-letters. She shall have them,—they may soften her. [*She takes up a slip of paper and reads on the outside.*] This is something for Mason, too. [*She puts it back in the case. She takes up a sealed envelope blank.*] Nothing on it, and sealed. *She looks at it a moment, thinking.*] Father, did you want this opened? If you didn't, why not have destroyed it? Ah! I needn't be afraid; *you* had nothing to hide from the world. [*Tearing it open, she reads.*] "I have discovered my son-in-law, Richard Sterling, in irregular business dealing. He is not honest. I will watch him as long as I live; but when you read this, Mason, keep your eye upon him for my daughter's sake. He has

been warned by me — he may never trip again, and her happiness lies in ignorance." [*She starts, and looks about her to make sure she is alone. She then sits staring ahead for a few seconds; then she speaks.*] My boy's father dishonest! Disgrace — he owned it — threatening *my* boy! It mustn't come! It mustn't! *I'll* watch now. [*She goes to the fireplace, tearing the paper as she crosses the room, she burns the letter; then she gathers up the other letters and the pocket case.*] He must give me his word of honor over Richard's little bed to-night that he will do nothing to ever make the boy ashamed of bearing his father's name!

[*She watches to see that every piece of the paper burns, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

Christmas Eve; fourteen months later; the dining room of the Hunters' house, which is now lived in jointly by the STERLINGS *and* MRS. HUNTER *and her daughters. It is a dark wainscoted room, with curtains of crimson brocade. It is decorated with laurel roping, mistletoe, and holly, for Christmas. It is the end of a successful dinner party, fourteen happy and more or less congenial persons being seated at a table, as follows:* WARDEN, RUTH, MASON, CLARA, TROTTER, MRS. HUNTER, BLANCHE, STERLING, MISS SILLERTON, MR. GODESBY, JESSICA, DOCTOR STEINHART, *and* MISS GODESBY. *The room is dark on all sides, only a subdued light being shed on the table by two large, full candelabra with red shaded candles. As the curtain rises the bare backs of the three women nearest the footlights gleam out white. Candied fruit and other sweetmeats are being passed by four men servants, including* JORDAN *and* LEONARD.

RUTH. My dear Blanche, what delicious candy!

MISS SILLERTON. Isn't it!

MISS GODESBY. Half of the candy offered one nowadays seems made of *papier-mâché*.

MRS. HUNTER [*to* MISS GODESBY]. Julia, do tell me how Mr. Tomlins takes his wife's divorce?

MISS GODESBY. He takes it with a grain of salt!

MRS. HUNTER. But isn't he going to bring a counter suit?

STERLING. No.

RUTH. I hope not. I am an old-fashioned woman and don't believe in divorce!

MISS GODESBY. Really! But then you're not married!

MISS SILLERTON. What is the reason for so much divorce nowadays?

RUTH. Marriage is the principal one.

BLANCHE. *I* don't believe in divorce, either.

MISS SILLERTON. My dear, no woman married to as handsome a man as Mr. Sterling would.

TROTTER. You people are all out of date! More people get divorced nowadays than get married.

BLANCHE. Too many people do — that's the trouble. I meant what I said when I was married — "for better, for worse, till death us do part." — What is the opera Monday?

TROTTER. Something of Wagner's. He's a Dodo bird! Bores me to death! Not catchy enough music for me.

MRS. HUNTER. You'd adore him if you went to Bayreuth. Which was that opera, Clara, we heard at Bayreuth last summer? Was it *Faust* or *Lohengrin!* They play those two so much here I'm always getting them mixed!

MISS SILLERTON. Wagner didn't write *Faust!*

MRS. HUNTER. Didn't he? I thought he had; he's written so many operas the last few seasons!

CLARA. I like *Tannhäuser*, because as soon as you hear the "twinkle, twinkle, little stars" song, you can cheer up and think of your wraps and fur boots.

TROTTER. My favorite operas are *San*

Toy and the *Roger Brothers,* though I saw *Florodora* thirty-six times!

BLANCHE. Mother would have gone with you every one of those thirty-six *Florodora* times. She's not really fond of music.

MRS. HUNTER. Not fond of music! Didn't I have an opera box for four years?

TROTTER. Why doesn't Conried make some arrangement with Weber and Fields and introduce their chorus into *Faust* and *Carmen?*

DR. STEINHART. Great idea! [*To* MISS GODESBY]. Did you get a lot of jolly presents?

MISS GODESBY. Not half bad, especially two fine French bulls!

[*All are laughing and talking together.*]

BLANCHE. What did you get, Mr. Warden?

WARDEN. Three copies of "David Harum," two umbrellas, and a cigar case too short for my cigars.

MISS GODESBY. Give it to me for cigarettes.

WARDEN. It's too long for cigarettes. Then I had something that's either a mouchoir or a handkerchief case, or for neckties, or shaving papers, or something or other.

TROTTER. Yes, I know, I got one of those, too.

DR. STEINHART. So did I!

BLANCHE. I must start the women; we are coming back here to arrange a surprise for you men.

[*She nods her head in signal to* STERLING, *and rises. All rise.*]

STERLING. One moment please. One toast on Christmas night! Ned, give us a toast.

ALL THE WOMEN [*but not in unison*]. Oh, yes! A toast! [*Ad lib.*]

WARDEN [*holding up his glass*].

Here's to those whom we love!

And to those who love us!

And to those who love those whom we love

And to those who love those who love us!

ALL THE MEN [*not in unison*]. Good! Bravo! Bully toast! [*Ad lib.*]

[*Every one drinks.*]

BLANCHE. One more toast, Dick. [*To the others.*] Christmas Day is our boy's birthday.

RUTH. Surely! a toast to Richard!

STERLING. Long life to Master Sterling, the best boy in the world, and to all his good friends at this table.

THE MEN. Hear! Hear!

[*All the women speak their next speeches at the same time.*]

BLANCHE [*laughing*]. Of course! I've dropped my handkerchief.

[NED *dives under the table for it.*]

MISS SILLERTON. O dear, my fan!

MISS GODESBY. What a bore; I've dropped a glove!

[STEINHART *goes under the table for it.*]

CLARA. Both my gloves gone — I'm so sorry!

[GODESBY *goes under the table for them.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Dick, please, I've dropped my smelling bottle.

[TROTTER *and* STERLING *go under the table for it.*]

RUTH. My gloves, please, I'm so sorry!

[MASON *goes under the table for them.*]

[*The speeches of the women are simultaneous, followed by the movements of the men also, all at the same time.*]

BLANCHE. Please don't bother; the servants —

[LEONARD, JORDAN, *and two extra men start to hunt under the table, too.*]

MISS GODESBY. Women ought to have everything they owned fastened to them with rubberneck elastics.

[*The men, somewhat flustered, all rise with various articles, and offer them to their respective owners.*]

[*All the women thank the men profusely, and apologize at the same time.* STERLING *takes* MRS. HUNTER *out at back, followed by all the other couples, all talking.* RUTH *and* MASON *lag behind.*]

RUTH [*to* BLANCHE, *who with* WARDEN *waits for* RUTH *and* MASON *to pass*]. I want just a minute with Mr.

Mason, Blanche. [Blanche *and* Warden *pass out before her.* Ruth *is alone with* Mason. *She speaks as if she were carrying on a conversation that had been interrupted. She speaks in a lowered voice, indicating the private nature of what she has to say.*] I sent him imperative word yesterday I must have the bonds. I told him I wanted one to give to his wife for Christmas. He pretends to-day he didn't receive this letter, but he must have.

Mason. This makes the third time there has been some excuse for not giving you the bonds?

Ruth. Yes, and this letter he says he didn't get was sent to his office by hand.

Mason. I'll speak to him before I leave.

[*They go out at back.*]

[*As they pass out,* Jordan *stands by the doorway holding the curtains back. The other three men stand stiffly at the Right. As* Mason *and* Ruth *go out, the* Servants *relax and exchange glances, each giving a little laugh out loud, except* Jordan. *During the following dialogue they empty the table preparatory to arranging the room for the Christmas tree.*]

Jordan. Sh! A very dull dinner, not an interesting word spoke.

First Footman. The widder seemed chipper like!

Leonard. And did you get on to the old lady's rig-out; mourning don't hang very heavy on her shoulders.

[*One chair is moved back.*]

Jordan [*to* First Footman]. Get the coffee. [*He goes out Right. To* Leonard.] Get the smoking lay-out!

[Leonard *goes out Right and brings back a silver tray laden with cigarettes, cigar boxes, and a burning alcohol lamp.*]

Leonard. If you ask me, I think she's going to put a bit more on the matrimonial mare if she gets the chance.

Jordan. It's none of your business. You're *Mrs. Sterling's* servant now.

Leonard. Good thing, too; it was a happy day for us when *they* moved in.

First Footman [*reënters with the coffee*]. Say, did you see how that young feller over there [*Motioning to the lower right-hand corner of the table.*] shovelled the food in?

Leonard. And the way he poured down the liquid — regular hog! My arm's tired a-filling of his glass.

[*And he drinks a glass of champagne which has been left untouched by a guest.*]

Jordan. He ain't nobody; he hasn't any money; he was just asked to fill up. He's one of these yere singing chaps what's asked to pass the time after dinner with a song or two *gratis.* This dinner'll last him for food for a week!

[*Their manners suddenly change as the men reënter and take seats about the two ends of the table.* Sterling, Mason, *and* Doctor *down Left form one group. The other men are in a group between the window and the other end. On entering* Sterling *speaks.*]

Sterling. Jordan, for heaven's sake, give us something to see by! You can't tell which end of your cigar to light in this confounded woman's candle-light. If I had my way, I'd have candelabras made of Welsbachs!

Trotter. Bright idea, Sterling.

[Sterling, *laughing, joins his group, who laugh gently with him.* Jordan *turns on the electric light. The servants pass the coffee, liqueurs, and the cigars and cigarettes. Meanwhile the following dialogue takes place, the men beginning to talk at once on their entrance.*]

Sterling. Mr. Mason, I'd like to ask your honest opinion on something if you'll give it me.

Mason. Certainly.

Sterling. This Hudson Electric Company.

Dr. Steinhart. Oh! Dropped fearfully to-day.

Sterling. But that can happen easily with the best thing. To-morrow —

Mason [*interrupting*]. To-morrow it will drop to its *very bottom!*

Sterling. I don't believe it.

DR. STEINHART. *Surely,* Mr. Mason, the men who floated that are too clever to ruin *themselves.*

MASON. They're out of it.

STERLING. Out of it!

MASON. They got out last week quietly.

STERLING. But—

MASON. Mark my words, the day after to-morrow there'll be several foolish people ruined, and *not one of the promoters of that company will lose a penny!*

STERLING. I don't believe it!

[*The crowd at the other end of the table, who have been listening to a tale from* TROTTER, *laugh heartily.*]

TROTTER [*delighted with his success*]. I'm no Dodo bird!

[WARDEN *leaves this group casually and joins the other.*]

MASON [*to* STERLING]. Don't tell me *you're* in it?

STERLING [*ugly*]. Yes, I am in it!

MASON. Not *much?*

STERLING. Yes, *much!*

WARDEN. Much what?

STERLING. Oh, nothing; we were just discussing stocks.

WARDEN. And up there they're discussing Jeffreys and Fitzsimmons.

MASON. Listen, Dick, after a lifelong experience in Wall Street, I defy any broker to produce one customer who can show a profit after three consecutive years of speculation.

STERLING. Oh, you're too conservative; nothing venture, nothing have. Excuse me, I think Jeffreys and Fitzsimmons more amusing topics. Come along.

[STERLING *and* DR. STEINHART *join the other group Right.*]

MASON [*to* WARDEN]. You're Sterling's broker.

WARDEN. No, not for over a year.

MASON. Then you can't tell me how deep he is in this Hudson Electric swindle?

WARDEN. Is he in it at all?

MASON. Yes, he says, deep.

WARDEN. I suspected it yesterday.

MASON. But what with—his wife's money?

WARDEN. That went fourteen months ago. I put him on his feet then, gave him some tips that enabled him to take this house with her mother, so that with his regular law business he ought to have done very well, but his living could not leave one cent over to speculate with.

MASON [*to himself*]. Good God!

WARDEN. I know what you're afraid of.

MASON. No!

WARDEN. Yes. The reason I'm no longer his broker is he was ashamed to let me know about his dealings.

MASON. But you don't mean you think he'd actually *steal!*

WARDEN. His *aunt's* money? Why not? *He did his wife's!*

MASON. Does he handle any one else's affairs?

WARDEN. I know he takes care of that Godesby woman's property.

MASON. And she wouldn't hold her tongue if a crash came!

WARDEN. Not for a minute! Is Miss Hunter suspicious?

MASON. Yes. Does Sterling realize that to-morrow he will most probably be a ruined cheat?

WARDEN. Very likely.

MASON. If he made up his mind to-night it was all up with him, he might do—what?

WARDEN. Run away with whatever money he has left, or kill himself. I don't know if he's enough of a coward for that or not. There's *one* hold on him—he loves his wife.

MASON. Which will make him all the more ashamed of discovery. Do you believe she suspects?

WARDEN. Not a bit. She loves him too dearly.

MASON. Can *we* do anything?

WARDEN. Nothing but watch him closely till the people go. Then force him to make a clean breast of it, so we can all know where we stand; how we can best protect his aunt from ruin and his wife and boy from public disgrace.

MASON. He is watching us.

WARDEN. He knows I know him; we must be careful. He's coming towards

us. [*He then speaks in a different tone, but no louder.*] You're certain of the trustworthiness of your information?

MASON. Absolutely. Every man left in that concern will be ruined before the 'Change closes after to-morrow [STERLING *has joined them in time to hear the end of* MASON'S *speech.*] I am telling Warden what I told you about the Hudson Electric Company.

STERLING. Can't you talk of something pleasanter?

[BLANCHE *reënters at back. On her entrance all the men rise. The servants finish preparing the room for the tree.*]

BLANCHE. I'm very sorry — I really can't let you men stay here any longer.

ALL THE MEN. Why not! How's that? [*Ad lib.*]

BLANCHE. You know we want to get this room ready for Santa Claus! Dick! [*She goes to her husband. All the men go out at back in a group led by* WARDEN *and* MASON. *They are all talking and laughing.* BLANCHE *is left alone with her husband.*] What is this Aunt Ruth has been telling me about not being able to get some bonds from you?

STERLING. Oh, nothing. I forgot to send them up to her, that's all.

BLANCHE. But she says she sent three times.

STERLING. One time too late to get into the vault; and the other, her letter was mislaid — I mean not given to me.

BLANCHE. You haven't broken your word to me?

STERLING. What if I had?

BLANCHE. I would let the law take its course.

STERLING. You must love me very little.

BLANCHE. I *live* with you. First you robbed me of my respect for you; then you dried up my heart with neglect.

STERLING. And our boy?

BLANCHE. Your blood runs in his veins; your shame and disgrace would be a fearful warning to him. It might kill *me;* but never mind, if it *saved him.*

STERLING. Oh, well, I haven't broken my word! So you needn't worry. I've been honest enough.

BLANCHE [*with a long sigh of relief*]. Oh! I hope so!

MRS. HUNTER [*appearing in doorway at back*]. The men are in the drawing-room — shall we come *here?*

BLANCHE. Yes, we'll bring the others, mother. Come, Dick.

[*She goes out with* MRS. HUNTER *at back.*]

STERLING [*goes to door Right, opens it, and calls*]. Leonard!

[LEONARD *enters Right.*]

LEONARD. Yes, sir?

STERLING. Go up to my library at the top of the house, get a railroad guide you will find there, and bring it down and put it on the table in the hall just outside the drawing-room door.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

STERLING. Then go to my room and pack my bag and dressing case. Do you understand?

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*The women are heard singing "Follow the Man from Cook's," and gradually coming nearer.*]

STERLING. Be quick, and say nothing to any one.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out quickly Right.* STERLING *goes up stage and stands beside the door at back as the women dance in, singing "Follow the Man from Cook's." They are led by* CLARA, *with* MRS. HUNTER *on the end.* BLANCHE *and* RUTH *follow alone, not dancing. The others dance around the chairs and* CLARA *jumps on and off one of them; this stops the rest, who balk at it.* STERLING *goes out at back. The* SERVANTS *enter Right.*]

CLARA. I don't care for this dinner party at all. The women are all the time being chased away from the men! I prefer being with Mr. Trotter. Don't you, mama?

MISS SILLERTON. He doesn't seem able

to give a dinner party any more without you to chaperone, Mrs. Hunter.

BLANCHE. Mother, how can you?

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, I don't know as it's *chaperoning!* I like Mr. Trotter very much.

MISS SILLERTON. But he's such a little cad. I tried to give him a lift, but he was too heavy for me.

CLARA. Oh, well, you ought just to pretend it's the money in his pocket makes him so heavy; then you'd find him dead easy.

[*Meanwhile the* SERVANTS *have arranged the table, taken out the extra leaves and made it square, and left the room. They now reenter, bringing in a gorgeously decorated and lighted Christmas tree. There is at once a loud chorus of delighted approval from the women. The* SERVANTS *place the tree in the center of the table. The women who are sitting rise and come near to examine the tree.*]

RUTH. What a beautiful tree, Blanche!

BLANCHE. The boy is to have it tomorrow morning — it's really *his* tree! [TOMPSON *brings in a large basket containing seven small stockings and six small boys' socks'— very small stockings and very small socks. They are made of bright and different colors and are stuffed into absurd, bulgy shapes.*] There's a name on each one. Come along now!

[*Taking out a little sock. The women crowd around the basket and each hangs a sock on the tree,* MISS GODESBY *and* CLARA *standing on chairs.*]

CLARA [*reading the name on her sock*]. Oh! mine's for Mr. Mason. What's in it, Blanche?

BLANCHE. I really can't tell you. I asked the clerk where I bought it what it was for, and he said he didn't know; it was a "Christmas present."

MISS GODESBY [*laughing*]. Oh, I know the kind! Mine's for Howard Godesby. What's his present?

BLANCHE. A silver golf marker.

MISS GODESBY. But he doesn't play golf!

BLANCHE. Well, he ought to; it'll keep him young.

CLARA. It will be all right, anyway, Julia! *You* can give it away to some one next Christmas.

MISS SILLERTON. What's in Mr. Trotter's?

BLANCHE. Oh, that present has almost been my death! Men are so hard to find things for! I had put in a gold pencil for his key chain, but to-night while we were eating our oysters, I saw him show a beauty that his mother had given him this morning! So I whispered to Jordan between the soup and fish to change Mr. Ryder's name to Mr. Trotter's stocking, and put Mr. Trotter's name on the one that had a cigarette case in it. I sneaked a message down to Dick on my dinner card — was it all right? — and he sent back word during the game that Trotter only smoked cigars; so before the ices were passed I shuffled Mr. Trotter's and Mr. Mason's names, — I'd given Mason the cigar case, — and just as Jordan signalled to me the transfer had been successfully effected, I heard Trotter casually observe he'd been obliged to give up smoking entirely — *doctor's orders!*

[*They laugh punctiliously, rather bored by* BLANCHE'S *long account.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Isn't the tree stunning?

CLARA [*getting down from her chair*]. It makes the table look like one of Mr. Trotter's "informal little dinners."

MISS GODESBY. They say he has one of those men who arrange shop windows decorate his dinner table for him!

BLANCHE. The only time I ever dined with him I was really ashamed to go home with my dinner favor — it was so gorgeous! And there were such big bunches of violets in the finger bowls there wasn't room for your little finger.

MISS GODESBY. You never saw such a lot of decoration! The game have ribbon garters on their legs, and even the raw oysters wear corsage bouquets! [*To* MRS. HUNTER.] I hope you don't mind what we're saying, Mrs. Hunter?

MRS. HUNTER [*offended*]. I must say

I do mind very much — [*A pause.*] — because — [*A second pause.*] — well, I am going to marry Mr. Trotter — [*All, not believing her, laugh merrily.*] You are all very rude!

MISS GODESBY. Not on the level! Not *Trotter!*

MISS SILLERTON. Not *really!*

BLANCHE. No, no, of course not!

[*She rings bell.*]

MRS. HUNTER. But I *am!* And I thought here at my daughter's table, among my own friends (I was allowed to name the guests to-night), I could count on good wishes and congratulations.

[*There is a dead silence.*]

[*The musicians, a band of Neapolitan players, enter and take their places in a recess at Left.*]

BLANCHE [*to the musicians*]. You may play. [*To* JORDAN, *who has brought in the Neapolitans.*] We are ready, Jordan.

[JORDAN *goes out at back.*]

[RUTH *goes to* BLANCHE.]

[*The guitars and mandolins begin a popular song.*]

MISS GODESBY [*to* MRS. HUNTER]. Oh, well, Mrs. Hunter, we were only codding! There's lots of good in Trotter, and I'm sure you'll bring it out. Good luck! [*Shaking her hand.*]

RUTH [*to* BLANCHE, *aside*]. You won't allow this!

BLANCHE. Certainly not. [BLANCHE *crosses to her mother and they go to one side together;* BLANCHE *speaks in a lowered voice.*] You've amazed and shocked me! I will not tolerate such a thing; we'll talk it over to-night.

[*She leaves her and returns to her guests,* MRS. HUNTER *standing where she is left, biting her lips and almost crying with rage and mortification.*]

MISS GODESBY [*before the musicians, to* BLANCHE *as she joins her*]. I'm crazy about these men, Mrs. Sterling; they play so awfully well — especially that one with the lovely legs!

[JORDAN *pulls aside the curtains at back and all the men reënter except* WARDEN. *They all join hands and dance around the tree, singing with the musicians; they break, and go up to a side table, where everything to drink is displayed.* WARDEN *enters at this moment and motions to* MASON *and leads him down stage.*]

WARDEN. There was a railway guide in the hall — that's what he went there for; he's *going to run away to-night.*

MASON. How'll we prevent it?

WARDEN. First, we must break up this party!

MASON. How?

WARDEN. I haven't quite thought yet. Go back to the others; send Jordan to me; don't lose sight of Dick. Jordan! [*He takes him aside.*] I want you to go out of this room this minute, pretend to go upstairs, then come back and tell Mrs. Sterling, loud enough for the others to hear you, that Master Richard is very ill, and say the maid is frightened.

JORDAN [*hesitating*]. But —

WARDEN [*quickly and firmly*]. Do as I tell you. I am responsible for whatever happens.

[JORDAN *goes out at back. The men and women are laughing and talking about the sideboard.*]

BLANCHE. Come now, everybody! Let's have the presents. Dick, you know you are to be Santa Claus.

[STERLING *looks nervously at his watch.*]

STERLING. Just a minute, dear! Ned! [*Takes* WARDEN *to one side. The women move about the tree, hunting for their own names on the stockings on the table at the foot of the tree.*] Ned, I've been suddenly called out of town on business — must catch the eleven-twenty train. I don't want to break up the party, so you empty the tree, and when the time comes for me to go, I'll slip out.

WARDEN. And when your guests go?

STERLING. Oh, then you can explain for me.

[JORDAN *enters at back.*]

JORDAN [*to* BLANCHE]. Beg pardon, madam, but Master Richard is very ill.

BLANCHE [*alarmed*]. Richard!

JORDAN. Yes, ma'am, and Droves is very frightened, ma'am.

RUTH. Richard ill?

[*All give exclamations of surprise and regret and sympathy.*]

BLANCHE. My little boy ill? Excuse me, I must go to him.

[*She hurries out at back.* RUTH *speaks to the musicians, who stop playing.*]

STERLING [*moved*]. My boy ill—why, I can't—I can't—

WARDEN. "Can't" what?

STERLING. How can I go away?

WARDEN. Surely you won't let business take you away from your boy who may be dying.

STERLING. No! I won't go! I'll face it out! I can't leave my boy like this—

RUTH [*coming to* STERLING]. I'm going to take these women away; tell Blanche not to give them a thought. Their evening up to now has been charming.

[*During* RUTH'S *speech,* WARDEN *has spoken aside with* MASON.]

WARDEN [*aside to* MASON]. Don't let Miss Hunter go.

RUTH [*to the other guests*]. Come to the drawing-room.

MRS. HUNTER. I was crazy to see what was in my stocking.

[*All pass out talking, expressing conventional sympathy on account of* RICHARD, *but evidently resenting the breaking up of the party.* STERLING *and* WARDEN *are left alone in the room.* STERLING *moves to go up to back;* WARDEN *interrupts him.*]

WARDEN [*to* STERLING]. Where are you going?

STERLING. To my boy and my wife.

WARDEN. Wait a minute; I want to speak to you.

STERLING. Speak to me later; I can't wait now.

BLANCHE [*off stage, at back, excitedly*]. Jordan! [*She enters, excited, half hysterical.*] Jordan! Where is Jordan? It was a lie! What did he mean? Richard is sleeping sweetly. The maid knows nothing of being alarmed! Where is Jordan?

[*She starts to go toward the door Right.*]

WARDEN [*stops her*]. Mrs. Sterling, he had nothing to do with it! *I* told Jordan to say what he said.

[BLANCHE *turns and looks at* WARDEN *in astonishment.*]

STERLING [*stunned and at once suspicious*]. What?

BLANCHE. But—

WARDEN. Forgive me for so cruelly alarming you; it was the only way I could think of for getting rid at once of your guests!

STERLING [*angry*]. You'll interfere once too often in the affairs of this house.

BLANCHE [*indignant*]. But what excuse can you make, Mr. Warden?

WARDEN. Will you be so good as to ask Miss Hunter and Mr. Mason to come here? They will explain what I have done, partly, and your husband will tell you the rest when you come back. [STERLING *sneers aloud.*]

BLANCHE. I don't understand, I don't understand.

[*She goes out at back.*]

STERLING. Well, I *do* understand, at least enough.

WARDEN. Good! That spares me a very disagreeable speech.

STERLING. No, it doesn't! Come out with it! What is it you want? What is it you've found out?

WARDEN. From betraying a trust, you've come, in less than two years, to an outright embezzlement.

STERLING. Speak out—give us facts!

WARDEN. You've stolen your aunt's fortune.

STERLING. *Prove that!*

WARDEN. It's *her money* that's lost in the Hudson Electric Company!

STERLING. PROVE IT!

WARDEN. Easy enough, to-morrow.

STERLING. You've got to excuse your action *to-night* or *be kicked* out of my house!

WARDEN [*strong*]. Isn't what I say the truth?

STERLING [*equally strong*]. No! And now get out!

WARDEN [*looks at his watch*]. I'll not

leave this house till it's too late for you to take that eleven-twenty.

STERLING [*more ugly*]. Yes, you will and mighty—

WARDEN. *No, I'll not!*

[*He is interrupted by the entrance of* BLANCHE, RUTH, *and* MASON.]

WARDEN [*to* BLANCHE]. I *hope* you forgive me now—

BLANCHE [*pathetically*]. You did right; I thank you.

STERLING [*heartbroken*]. Blanche—without hearing a word from me!

BLANCHE. No, I've come now to hear what *you* have to say.

[*A deep-toned clock strikes eleven.* STERLING, *at the second stroke, takes out his watch with a hurried movement.*]

WARDEN [*quickly*]. Eleven o'clock.

STERLING. I wish Warden to leave the room.

BLANCHE [*firmly*]. And I wish him to stay. [*A short pause.*]

STERLING. Well, of what am I accused?

WARDEN. Nobody wants to accuse you. We want you to make a clean breast of it.

STERLING. Don't you talk to me; let my wife do the talking if you want me to answer.

BLANCHE. Sit down, Aunt Ruth. [RUTH *sits by the table,* WARDEN *stands at back.* STERLING *stands at Right and* BLANCHE *and* MASON *sit near the center.*] Aunt Ruth asks you to give her a true account of her trust in you. Mr. Mason is here as her friend and my father's.

STERLING. I haven't said I betrayed her trust. I told her she should *have* the bonds she wants to-morrow.

BLANCHE. But *will* she? That's what I want to know. I ask you if you haven't her bonds, to tell us here now,—tell *us,* who have been and must be still the best friends, perhaps the only friends, you can have. Tell us where we all stand—are we the only ones to suffer or are there others who will perhaps be less generous in their treatment of you? Tell us now while there is time perhaps to save us from public scandal, from the disgrace which would stamp your wife as the wife of a thief, and send your boy out into the world the son of a convict cheat. [*She breaks down, but in a moment controls herself. There is no answer.* STERLING *sinks into a chair, his arms on the table, his head on his arms. A moment's silence.*] You *love* me—I know that. I appeal to your love; let your love of me persuade you to do what I ask. I ask it for your sake and for *mine!* Tell us here the truth now—it will spare me much to-morrow, perhaps—me whom you love—for love of me—

STERLING [*in an agony*]. I'm afraid I'll lose you—

BLANCHE. No, I'll promise to stand by you if you'll only tell *us all* the truth.

STERLING [*in a low, shamed voice*]. I'll tell *you,* but not *now*—not before all these others.

[BLANCHE *looks up questioningly to* MASON. MASON *shakes his head.*]

BLANCHE. It *must* be *now,* Dick.

STERLING. No! no! I can't look you in the face and tell it! Let me tell it to you *alone,* later, in the dark.

[BLANCHE *looks up questioningly to* MASON. *He shakes his head.*]

BLANCHE. It must be now.

STERLING. No, no, I'm too ashamed, I can't face you; in the dark I'll make a clean breast of it—let me tell you in the dark.

[WARDEN *moves and puts his hand on the electric-light button beside the doorway at back.*]

WARDEN. In the DARK, then *tell it!*

[*He presses the button and all the lights go out. The stage is in complete darkness; only the voices are heard from the different places in which the actors are last seen.*]

BLANCHE [*quickly*]. Remember, to help you, to help ourselves, we must know everything. Go on.

STERLING. It began fourteen months ago, after Ned Warden put me on my feet; I got a little ahead—why not get way ahead? There were plenty of men around me making their fortunes! I wanted to equal them—climb as high

as they; it seemed easy enough for them, and luck had begun to come my way. We're all climbers of some sort in this world. I was a climber after wealth and everything it brings—

[*He stops a moment.*]

BLANCHE [*her voice comes throbbing with pathetic emotion through the darkness*]. And *I* after *happiness* and all it brings.

STERLING [*deeply moved, his voice trembles for a moment, but only for a moment*]. Don't, Blanche, or I can't finish. Well, I borrowed on some of Aunt Ruth's bonds and speculated—I made a hundred thousand in a week! I put back the bonds. But it had been so easy! I could see those bonds grinning at me through the iron side of the vault box. They seemed to smile and beckon, to *beg* me to take them out into the air again! They grew to be like living things to me, servants of mine to get me gold—and finally I determined to make one bigger coup than ever! I took Aunt Ruth's bonds out and all the money available in my trust, and put it *all* into this new company! It seemed so safe. I stood to be a prince among the richest! And, for a day or so, I've known nothing short of a miracle could save me from being wanted by the police! To-night I gave up even the miracle. That's all. It's no use saying I'm sorry.

[*A moment's pause.*]

MASON. Have others suffered besides Miss Hunter?

STERLING. There is some money of Aunt Ruth's left—stock I couldn't transfer. But I used the money of others—Miss Godesby and Ryder's.

MASON. Miss Ruth, a large part of your fortune is gone, used unlawfully by this man. Will you resort to the law?

RUTH [*very quietly*]. No!

BLANCHE [*in a voice broken with emotion and gratitude*]. Aunt Ruth!

MASON. We can't hope Miss Godesby and Ryder will be as lenient! You must go to them in the morning—tell them everything, put yourself at their mercy, ask for time and silence.

STERLING. *Never!* I couldn't do that.

MASON. It is the only honorable way out of your dishonorable action—the least you can do!

STERLING. Confess to their faces, and probably to no good? Eat the dust at their feet, and most likely be clapped into prison for it? *No, thank you!*

BLANCHE. Suppose *I* went to them?

STERLING. You?

RUTH. No! Why should *you!*

STERLING. Yes! Why not? They might keep silent for *her!*

BLANCHE. I would do it for my boy's sake. Yes, *I'll* go.

STERLING. *Yes! You* go, Blanche.

RUTH. No, you *sha'n't* go—you sha'n't humiliate yourself in his place!

MASON. Certainly not; and if your husband is willing, we are not willing! *He* must go.

BLANCHE. But if he *won't?*

MASON. He *must!*

RUTH. You must demand his going, Blanche, and I demand it, too, as something due to me.

BLANCHE. Very well. I demand it. Will you go?

[*A moment's silence.*]

WARDEN. Why don't you speak? [*He presses the electric button and all the lights come on.* STERLING *is at the doorway at back, about to steal out. There is an exclamation aloud from all of surprise and disgust. The clock strikes the quarter;* WARDEN *catches hold of* STERLING'S *arm.*] What's your hurry, Dick? There goes the quarter hour; you could never catch the eleven-twenty.

STERLING. Damn you!

[*Facing* WARDEN *squarely, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS QUICKLY

ACT III

At "The Hermitage," on the Bronx River, the next afternoon. The house is on the Left, and on the Right and at the back are the green lattice arches. Snow lies thick

everywhere, on the benches at the Right and on the little iron table beside it, on the swing between two trees at the Right, in the red boxes of dead shrubs, on the rocks and dried grass of a "rookery" in the center, and on the branches of the trees. CLARA *comes out from the house, followed by* TROTTER.

CLARA. Come on and let mama rest awhile — naturally she's excited and tired out, being married so suddenly and away from home. [*She stops beside the swing, taking hold of its side rope with her hand.*] It isn't every mother who can elope without her oldest child's consent and have her youngest daughter for a bridesmaid.

[*Laughing.*]

TROTTER. I hope Mrs. Sterling will forgive me. Perhaps she will when she sees how my money can help your mother and me to get right in with all the smarties!

CLARA. Oh, don't you be too sure about your getting in; it isn't as easy as the papers say! But, anyway, that wouldn't make any difference to Blanche. She was never a climber like mama and me. I suppose that's why she is asked to all sorts of houses through Aunt Ruth that wouldn't let mama and me even leave our cards on the butler!

TROTTER. I thought your mother could go anywhere she liked.

CLARA. Oh, no, she couldn't! if she made you think that, it was only a jolly! Blanche is the only one of us who really went everywhere. Come along, *"Poppa,"* give me a swing! I haven't had one for years!

[*She sweeps off the snow from the seat of the swing with her hand.*]

TROTTER. Your mother certainly did represent —

CLARA [*sitting in the swing*]. Oh, well, now don't blame mama! She couldn't help herself; she always thought you *dreadfully handsome!* Swing me!

TROTTER. I don't care, anyway. I'm deucedly proud of your mother, — I mean of *my wife,* — and I'd just as lief throw up the whole society business and go off and live happily by ourselves.

CLARA. O dear! I think mama would find that awfully dull. Go on, swing me! [TROTTER *swings her.*] Of course, you'll find mama a little different when you see her all the time. You really won't see much more of her, though, than you do now. She doesn't get up till noon, and has her masseuse for an hour every morning, her manicure and her mental science visitor every other day, and her face steamed three times a week! She has to lie down a lot, too, but you mustn't mind that; you must remember she isn't our age!

TROTTER [*swings her*]. She *suits* me!

CLARA. That's what *I feel!* You'll take care of her, and me, too, all our lives, and that's what makes me so happy. I'm full of plans! We'll go abroad soon and stay two years. [*He has stopped swinging her.*] Go on, swing me!

TROTTER [*holding the swing still*]. Say! if you think you are going to run me and the whole family, you're a Dodo bird! Remember that you're my daughter; you must wait a little if you want to be a mother-in-law.

[*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming nearer.*]

CLARA. Good gracious! If you ask *me,* I think mama has got her hands full. What's become of Miss Godesby and her brother?

TROTTER. When you went upstairs with your mother, they went down the road.

CLARA. You know originally the idea was *I* was to marry you.

TROTTER. Really —

CLARA [*laughingly*]. Yes, and mama cut me out.

TROTTER. Oh, well, it can't be helped; we can't marry everybody.

CLARA [*noticing the bells*]. *Somebody else arriving!* That's queer — nobody comes here in the winter; that's why we chose it, because it would be quiet! Let's play this game.

[*Going to an iron frog on a box which stands near the house.*]

TROTTER. Perhaps it's Mrs. Sterling.

CLARA. No; if she was coming at all,

she'd have come in time for the wedding. [*She takes up the disks which lie beside the frog.*] I should hate to get married like you and mama — no splurge and no presents! Why, the presents'd be half the fun! And think of all those you and she've given in your life, and have lost now a good chance of getting back.

[*Throws a disk into the frog's open mouth.*]

TROTTER. *I'll* give your mother all the presents she wants. I can afford it; I don't want anybody to give us anything!

CLARA. You talk like Jess! [*Throws another disk.*] You know Jess earns her own living. She goes around to smart women's houses answering their invitations and letters for 'em. She calls it being a visiting secretary, but I tell her she's a *co-respon-dent!*

[*Throws a disk.*]

[WARDEN *and* MASON *enter from behind the house quickly, with a manner of suppressed excitement. They are surprised to find* CLARA *and* TROTTER.]

WARDEN. Why, here they are!

MASON. No, only Miss Clara and Trotter.

WARDEN. Lucky I met you — you must take me back in your sleigh.

MASON. Yes, the riding's beastly.

TROTTER. Hello! I say, were you invited?

CLARA. Merry Christmas!

WARDEN. We came to see the Godesbys.

CLARA. They've gone down the road.

MASON. Sterling isn't here, is he?

TROTTER. No, haven't seen him.

CLARA. Do you know *why* we're here?

[MASON *and* WARDEN *are embarrassed.*]

MASON. Yes — er — er — a — many happy returns, Mr. Trotter.

TROTTER. It's a great day for me, Mr. Mason!

WARDEN. Wish you joy, Trotter!

[*Embarrassed and not going near him.* TROTTER *rushes eagerly to him and grasps his hand warmly.*]

TROTTER. Thank you, old man! I say! *Thank you!*

MASON. Miss Clara, would do me the great favor of going down the road and hurrying the Godesbys back if you see them?

CLARA. Yes, I don't mind; come along, Trotty!

WARDEN. You must excuse Trotter. I want a talk with him if he will give me five minutes.

CLARA. Oh, certainly.

[*She goes out Left behind the house.*]

WARDEN [*to* MASON]. Will you see Mrs. Hunter?

TROTTER. I beg your pardon, Mrs. *Trotter!*

WARDEN [*politely*]. I beg yours. [*To* MASON.] See Mrs. Trotter.

MASON [*aside to* WARDEN]. You're going to ask *him* to go on Dick's note for Ryder?

WARDEN [*in a low voice*]. Yes.

MASON. You're a wonder! As if *he* would!

WARDEN. *Somebody must,* and there's nobody else. That boy and that mother have got to be saved!

MASON. I'm sorry my name's no good for us.

WARDEN. And mine mustn't be used.

MASON. No, indeed! The minute that was done, there'd be a new complication, and more trouble would tumble down on Mrs. Sterling's head. Good luck.

[*Shakes his hand and enters the house.*]

TROTTER. What's up? *You* haven't come to kick about my wedding, have you? I wouldn't stand for that, you know!

WARDEN. It's not that, Mr. Trotter. Your wife's son-in-law, Sterling, has turned out a blackguard; he has had intrusted to him Miss Ruth Hunter's money and several other people's, and he's used it all for speculation of his own.

TROTTER. Then he's a damned thief!

[*He sits on the bench with the manner that he has settled the subject.*]

WARDEN. So he is, and he's ruined.

TROTTER. Well, prison is the place for *him*.

WARDEN. We won't argue that, but how about his family — they get punished for what he has done; they must share his disgrace.

TROTTER. Oh, well, my wife is out of all that now — *she's Mrs. Trotter*.

WARDEN. Yes, but *her own daughter suffers*.

TROTTER [*on the defensive*]. She isn't very chummy with her classy eldest daughter.

WARDEN. Never mind that; you know without my telling you that Mrs. Sterling is a fine woman.

TROTTER. She always snubbed me right and left, but, by George, I must own she is a fine woman.

WARDEN. That's right! [*Clapping him on the back and putting his arm around his shoulder.*] Look here — help us save her!

TROTTER. How?

WARDEN. Indorse a note of Sterling's to give Ryder to keep him quiet.

TROTTER. I'd have to ask my wife.

WARDEN. No! Don't start off like that! Keep the reins in your own hands at the very beginning, — make her realize from this very day that you're raised up on the cushion beside her; that she's sitting lower down admiring the scenery, while you do the driving through life!

TROTTER [*half laughing*]. Ha! I guess you're right. Box seat and reins are good enough for me!

WARDEN. Good boy! Then we can count on you to sign this note?

TROTTER. Where's *my* security?

WARDEN. I can get you security if you want it.

TROTTER. Of course I want it! And I say, where are *you?* Why aren't *you* in it?

WARDEN. There are reasons why my name had better not appear; you are in the family. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Trotter; I'll secure *you* with a note of my own — only you must keep it dark; you mustn't even let Mason know.

TROTTER. All right, perhaps I'm a Dodo bird, but I'll do it. Say, I seem to have married a good many of this classy family!

WARDEN. Trotter, no one's done you justice! And, by George! you deserve a better fate — er — I mean — my best wishes on your wedding day.

[TROTTER *shakes his hand delightedly.*]

TROTTER. Great day for me! What I wanted was style and position, and some one classy who would know how to spend my money for me!

WARDEN. Well, you've got *that, surely!*

[CLARA *comes back from the house.*]

CLARA. The Godesbys are coming. Trotter, there's skating on the river near here, and they've skates in the house — don't you want a spin?

TROTTER. Yes, I don't mind — if my wife doesn't need me! [CLARA *laughs as* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *enter from behind the house.* TROTTER *meets them, with* CLARA *on his arm.*] Excuse us for a little while!

CLARA. *Poppa* and I're going skating!

[*They go out Left.*]

GODESBY. Hello, Warden.

WARDEN. Good morning, Miss Godesby.

MISS GODESBY. Good morning.

WARDEN. How are you, Godesby? I've come on a matter most serious, most urgent — something very painful.

GODESBY. What is it?

[*Comes forward.*]

WARDEN. Both of you trusted Dick Sterling.

MISS GODESBY. What's he done?

WARDEN. Misused your funds.

GODESBY. How d'you mean?

WARDEN. I mean that the money you intrusted to him is gone, and I've come to make a proposition to you.

MISS GODESBY. Gone?

[GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *are aghast. A second's silence, during which* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *look at each other, then back at* WARDEN.]

GODESBY. Do you mean to say —

WARDEN. The money is *gone*, every penny of it, and I want you to accept

a note from Sterling to cover the amount.

MISS GODESBY. I can't *grasp* it!

GODESBY. Where is Sterling? Why didn't *he* come?

WARDEN. He was ashamed.

GODESBY. I should hope so!

WARDEN. Several of us are going to stick by him; we'll manage to put him on his feet again, and we want you to accept his note.

GODESBY [*incredulous*]. Accept his note?

MISS GODESBY [*also incredulous*]. On *what security?*

GODESBY [*quickly*]. You'll do nothing of the sort, Julia!

MISS GODESBY. I'll see him where he belongs, in State's Prison, first!

WARDEN. That wouldn't bring you back your money.

MISS GODESBY. Neither will his note!

WARDEN. If I get it indorsed?

GODESBY. Likely!

MISS GODESBY. Rather!

WARDEN. I want your silence to keep it from the public for the family's sake. I've secured a satisfactory indorser for a note to satisfy Ryder's claim.

MISS GODESBY. Why didn't you give him to *me* instead of Ryder?

WARDEN. I felt you would be willing, out of friendship—

[*There are sleigh-bells in the distance, coming nearer.*]

MISS GODESBY. Huh! you must take me for an idiot!

WARDEN. Out of friendship for his wife.

MISS GODESBY. Blanche Sterling! I never could bear her! She's always treated me like the dirt under her feet!

WARDEN. You dined with her last night.

MISS GODESBY. That was to please her mother. No, if my money's gone, Sterling's got to suffer, and the one slight consolation I shall have will be that Blanche Sterling will have to come off her high horse.

[*The sleigh-bells stop.*]

GODESBY [*to* MISS GODESBY]. Ten to one if you agree to sign this note—

WARDEN. And keep silent.

MISS GODESBY [*satirically*]. Oh, yes, of course, the next morning when I wake up Sterling will be gone! Nobody knows where!

WARDEN. I've had it out with Sterling! I am here as his representative. I give you my word of honor Sterling will not run away. It is under such an understanding with him that I am pleading his case in his stead. He will stay here and work till he has paid you back, every cent.

[JESSICA *enters hurriedly from the house.*]

JESSICA [*in great excitement*]. Mr. Warden, Mr. Warden, Dick has gone!

WARDEN. *Sterling? Gone?*

MISS GODESBY. *Gone?*

GODESBY. *That's good!*

WARDEN. Don't be a fool, Godesby. How do you mean "gone," Miss Hunter?

JESSICA. I don't altogether know. While I was out this morning, Blanche received a message from mother saying she'd been—

[*She hesitates, looking toward* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY.]

WARDEN. They know. They're your mother's guests here.

JESSICA. She told Blanche they would be glad to have her here at one o'clock for breakfast. Blanche ordered the sleigh at once and went away, leaving word for me I was to open any message which might come for her.

WARDEN [*to* GODESBY]. Has she been here?

GODESBY. Not that I know of.

MISS GODESBY [*eager to hear more*]. No, no!

JESSICA. No, they say not. She probably went first to Aunt Ruth's. Before I got back, Dick, who'd been out—

WARDEN. He was at my house.

JESSICA. Yes. He came back, questioned Jordan as to where Blanche was, went upstairs, and then went away again, leaving a note for Blanche, which I found when I came home—

WARDEN [*eagerly*]. Yes?

JESSICA. It simply said, "Good-by. Dick."

MISS GODESBY [*very angry*]. Oh!

GODESBY [*quickly*]. He's taken a train! He's cleared out!

WARDEN. Do you know if he took a bag or anything with him?

JESSICA. No, he took nothing of that sort. Jordan went into his room and found a drawer open and empty, a drawer in which Dick kept a *pistol!* —

[*She drops her voice almost to a whisper.*]

WARDEN. Good God, he's shot himself!

JESSICA. Perhaps not — he left the house.

WARDEN. Yes, if he were really determined to shoot himself, why wouldn't he have done it there in his own room?

JESSICA. What can we do? What can we do?

WARDEN. I'll get Mr. Mason; he's with your mother; he must go back to town at once.

[*Going to the house.*]

JESSICA. He can go with me; I'd better be at the house. Some one must be there.

WARDEN. Good!

[*He goes into the house.*]

[MISS GODESBY *and her brother ignore and apparently forget the presence of* JESSICA *in their excitement. They both speak and move excitedly.*]

MISS GODESBY. I ought to have suspected something when Sterling told me he was getting ten per cent for my money, — the blackguard!

GODESBY. I always told you you were a fool not to take care of your money yourself! You know more about business than most men.

MISS GODESBY. I didn't want to be bothered; besides, there was always something very attractive about Sterling. I don't mind telling you that if he had fallen in love with me instead of the stiff-necked woman he married, I'd have tumbled over myself to get him.

GODESBY. How do you feel about him now?

MISS GODESBY. Now! Thank God, I'm saved such a waking up! It's going to make a big difference with my income, Howard! I wonder if his wife knew he was crooked! I'll bet you she's got a pot of money stowed away all right in her own name.

JESSICA [*who can bear no more, interrupts*]. Please — please! Remember that you're speaking of my sister and that every word you are saying cuts through me like a knife.

MISS GODESBY. I beg your pardon; I ought to have thought. I like and respect you, Jess, and I've been very rude.

JESSICA. You've been more than that; you've been cruelly unjust to Blanche in all that you've said!

MISS GODESBY. Perhaps I have, but I don't feel in a very generous mood; I've some excuse — so please forgive me.

[WARDEN *reënters Left.*]

WARDEN [*to* JESSICA]. Mason is waiting for you with the sleigh. He's going first to my house. Dick may have gone back there to hear the result of my interview with Ryder, — then Mason'll try his own house and Sterling's club.

GODESBY. The *police* are the best men to find Sterling, whatever's happened.

WARDEN [*to* GODESBY]. You wait a minute with me; I haven't finished with you yet. [*To* JESSICA.] I'll stay here for your sister, in case she comes.

[JESSICA *goes out Left.*]

GODESBY [*to* MISS GODESBY]. Don't you give in!

MISS GODESBY. Not for a minute!

[*To* WARDEN.] Don't you think, under the circumstances, the wedding breakfast had better be called off, and my brother and I go back to town?

WARDEN. Not till you've given me your promise, both of you, that you will keep silent about the embezzlement of your bonds for the sake of Mrs. Sterling and her son.

MISS GODESBY [*half laughs*]. Huh!

WARDEN. For the sake of her mother, who is your friend.

[*Sleigh-bells start up loud and die off quickly;* JESSICA *has gone.*]

MISS GODESBY. Oh, come, you know

what sort of friends we are,—for the amusement we can get out of each other. This is the case,—I trusted this man with my affairs. He was very attractive—I don't deny that; business with Dick Sterling became more or less of a pleasure—but that doesn't cut any ice with me; he's stolen my money. To put it plainly, he's a common thief, and he ought to be punished; why should he go scot free and a lot of others not? You know perfectly well his note wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on; and, anyway, if he hasn't gone and sneaked out of the world, I won't lift my little finger to keep him from the punishment he deserves!

GODESBY. Good for you, Julia!

WARDEN. Don't you put your oar in, Godesby; just let this matter rest between your sister and me! She's always been known as the best man in your family.

GODESBY. You don't choose a very conciliatory way of bringing us around!

WARDEN. I'm not choosing any way at all; I'm striking right out from the shoulder. There isn't time for beating round the bush! I'm pleading for the good name and honorable position of a perfectly innocent, a fine, woman, and for the reputation and unimpeded career of her son! And I make that appeal as man to man and woman!

MISS GODESBY. I have nothing to do with any one in this matter but Sterling himself, who has robbed me, and I'll gladly see him suffer for it!

WARDEN. Now look here, Miss Godesby, you belong to a pretty tough crowd in society, but I know at heart you're not a bad sort! What good will it do you? Granted even that you don't care for Mrs. Sterling, still don't tell me you're the kind of woman to take a cruel pleasure in seeing another woman suffer! I wouldn't believe it! You're not one of those catty creatures! You're a clever woman, and I don't doubt you can be a pretty hard one, too, at times; but you're *just*—that's the point now —*you're* JUST—

MISS GODESBY [*interrupting*]. Exactly! I'm just, an eye for an eye! Sterling is a thief, let him get the deserts of one!

[*She sits on the bench determinedly.*]

WARDEN. But you can't look at only one side! You can't shut your eyes to his wife's suffering, too; and she doesn't deserve it! Neither does her boy deserve to share his disgrace. [*He sits beside her.*] Why, you have it in your power to handicap that boy through his whole life by publishing his father a criminal; or you can give that boy a fair show to prove himself more his *mother's son* than his father's, and to live an honest—who knows—perhaps a noble life!

MISS GODESBY. I refuse to accept such a responsibility. Ryder—

WARDEN [*rises, interrupting her*]. Ryder's word is given to be silent.

MISS GODESBY. Well, that's *his* lookout.

WARDEN. You'll have many a heart wrench I'll bet you! You'll have to run across the results of the harm you do to Mrs. Sterling and Richard day in and day out, year after year! I don't believe you realize what it means! Why, I know *you* can't bear to see a *dog* suffer! I met you last week on the street carrying a mangy, crippled brute of a little dog in your arms, afraid lest he'd get into the hands of the vivisectionists, and yet here you'll let a boy and his mother—

MISS GODESBY [*interrupts him, struggling against a tiny emotion which he has stirred*]. Stop! Stop! I don't want you working on my feelings that way. [*She rises and turns from him.*]

WARDEN [*follows her*]. I'm only knocking at the door of your heart. And now because it's opened just a tiny way, you want to shut it in my face again. Will you leave this woman's name fit for her to use? *Won't* you make that boy's life worth living to him?

MISS GODESBY [*after a moment's pause, looks straight into* WARDEN'S *face*]. I'll tell you what I'll do. Get me some security, some sort of indorsement of Sterling's note—

WARDEN. If the man's only alive!

Miss Godesby. And I'll hold my tongue.

Warden. How long will you give me?

Miss Godesby. Oh, come, I can't have any monkey business! You must get me my security to-day.

Warden. To-day?

Miss Godesby. Yes.

Warden. But—

Miss Godesby. That's my last word. Godesby. Stick to that, Julia!

Warden. I sha'n't try to persuade her against that. Will you leave your sister alone with me a moment. Perhaps you'll see about your sleigh being ready to return to town.

Godesby. I've no objection—if Julia wishes it.

Miss Godesby. Yes, go on, Howard!

[Godesby *goes out back of house.*]

Warden [*left alone with* Miss Godesby, *goes nearer to her*]. Look here! Will you accept *my* indorsement? Will *I* be all right?

Miss Godesby [*incredulously*]. Certainly.

Warden. Then it's settled?

Miss Godesby. You don't mean it!

Warden. I do.

Miss Godesby. You'd be willing to lose —[*A revelation comes to her.*] Oh—for *Mrs. Sterling!* I see!

Warden [*very seriously*]. I *wouldn't.* I wouldn't see.

Miss Godesby. And she's always been blackguarding me for my affairs with men! And all the time—

Warden [*interrupts strongly*]. Don't say any more, please, *Miss Godesby!* I only wish your brother had said that much instead of you.

Miss Godesby [*disagreeably*]. So you're in love with Blanche Sterling?

Warden. No!

Miss Godesby. Oh, come, don't tell a lie about it; that will only make it seem worse.

Warden. Well, suppose I were in love with her—what of it?

Miss Godesby. Nothing; only, my dear Warden, that woman—

Warden [*interrupts*]. Wait a minute! You've got me in a corner, but knowing half the truth, you mustn't *guess* the whole. She is even more ignorant of my love for her than you were ten minutes ago! [Miss Godesby *smiles and makes a little satirical exclamation.*] You don't believe that, but I'll *make* you. I'm going to tell *you* something I've never even told myself. I'm going to put you to a big test, because I've got to. Apparently, I can't help myself; but after all, somehow I believe in the human nature in you, and you've got it in your power to help or hurt the woman I love—I say those words aloud for the first time—the woman I love!

[*He has finished his speech in a lowered tone throbbing with controlled feeling.*]

Miss Godesby [*incredulously*]. You've never told her?

Warden. Never; and you show how little you really know her when you ask that question! She loves her husband.

Miss Godesby. I'm not so sure about that!

Warden. I am, and I *love her.* But surely the silent love of a man, like mine, is no insult to a good woman—cannot harm her! A love that is never spoken, not even whispered, can't hurt any one, except, perhaps, the one who loves. You must acknowledge even *you* have never heard a hint; you *showed* just now your real surprise at what circumstances revealed to you! I'd die sooner than bring the slightest shadow of a scandal on her, and I've hugged my secret tight. Have you any idea what such a love means? How it grows and grows, its strength shut in, held back, doubling and redoubling its powers!—its ideality increasing, the passion *suppressed,* locked up! Good God! I tremble sometimes when I think—suppose some day it should burst out, *break* my control, MASTER ME! [*A pause.*] And here, now, I've told *you;* I'm sorry, but I had to for *her* sake again. Will you help me keep my secret?

Miss Godesby [*after a second's pause*]. Yes, because I believe you.

Warden. And Mrs. Sterling?

Miss Godesby [*slowly, with sincere meaning*]. I envy her!

[*Her voice breaks and she turns away from him.*]

WARDEN. No one is to know I indorse Sterling's note?

MISS GODESBY. You needn't sign the note; my brother'd have to see it. I'll take your word for the indorsement.

[*She offers him her hand. They shake hands.*]

WARDEN. What a brick you are! You know you don't do yourself anything like justice in the world!

[GODESBY *reënters Left and after him a* MAN SERVANT *in ordinary clothes, who passes through the archway at back Center.*]

GODESBY. Ready!

WARDEN [*aside to her*]. You can promise his silence about Sterling?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, yes, he's absolutely dependent upon me.

WARDEN. Thank you.

MISS GOODESBY [*to* NED *with a forced gaiety*]. Good-by!

WARDEN [*again shaking her hand*]. Good-by.

[*He looks his thanks at her.*]

GODESBY. Well? What did you do?

MISS GODESBY [*as they go*]. Don't worry; I've taken care of myself for many years, and I still feel up to it!

[*They go out Left and at the same time the* SERVANT *enters from the archway at back Center carrying some fire logs in his arms. This* SERVANT *speaks with a slight French accent. As he reaches the house,* WARDEN *stops him with a question, and the* GODESBYS' *sleigh-bells start up and quickly die away. The sun begins to set.*]

WARDEN. Have you an empty sitting room?

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

WARDEN. Warm?

SERVANT. I will soon arrange a fire.

WARDEN. I wish you would, please.

SERVANT. Ze big room for ze breakfast is altogether ready and warm; you will be able to go in there now.

WARDEN. No, that wouldn't do. It's all right out here for *me,* only I am expecting a lady.

[*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming quickly nearer.*]

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

WARDEN. I hear a sleigh coming. If a lady is in it, ask if her name is Mrs. Sterling, and if she says yes, tell her Mr. Warden is here and would like to speak with her a moment before she goes in to Mrs.—

[*He hesitates a second.*]

SERVANT. Trottair?

WARDEN. Yes.

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

[*He goes into the house.*]

[*The sun grows red, and the colors of sunset creep over the sky during the scene which follows. After a moment the* SERVANT *shows* BLANCHE *out from the house.*]

BLANCHE [*surprised and depressed*]. Good morning, Mr. Warden, have you been asked to these funeral baked meats?

WARDEN. No, I'll explain why I am here in a few minutes. Only let me ask you first when you last saw your husband?

BLANCHE. Early this morning.

WARDEN. And you have come just now from where?

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth's. Of course you know about my mother? When I heard it I started to come here, but my heart failed me and I turned back to my aunt's. She has persuaded me that I ought to come and put the best face on the matter possible, but it seems as if I'd had now a little more than I *can* bear!

[*Her voice breaks and her eyes fill with tears.*]

WARDEN [*almost tenderly*]. Shall we go inside?

BLANCHE. No, no! Let us stay out in the air; my head would burst in one of these close little rooms. Have you seen mother?

WARDEN. No, not yet.

BLANCHE. Where is Dick? Did he go to Ryder's?

WARDEN. No, but I have some good

news to tell you all the same — Ryder has promised silence.

BLANCHE [*with tremendous relief*]. Oh! that's too good, too good to be true! To whom did he promise?

WARDEN. I want you not to ask me that.

BLANCHE. I can guess, it was —

WARDEN [*lying*]. No, it was — *Mason.*

BLANCHE [*doubting him*]. Mr. Mason?

WARDEN. And I've more good news for you, Mrs. Sterling — the *Godesbys,* too; *they* will be silent.

BLANCHE. You're sure?

WARDEN. We have their word!

BLANCHE [*pointedly*]. Mr. Mason again? — [WARDEN *bows his head in assent.*] He was *here?*

WARDEN. Some time ago, but only for a minute. He didn't stay; he went to find your husband.

BLANCHE. But the *Godesbys?* I just met them now on the road going back. How could Mr. Mason, if he didn't stay — [WARDEN *is embarrassed, and is silent, searching a way out of it.*] Oh, no! no! it wasn't Mr. Mason! I see the whole thing clearly. Dick was too great a coward, and *you* did it! It was *you* who won over Ryder! It was *you* who persuaded the Godesbys! — [WARDEN *shakes his head and makes a movement to deny it.* BLANCHE *continues speaking, the words rushing to her lips, as her pent-up heart opens and lets all her emotions suddenly free.*] Don't try to deny it; you can't make me believe you! It's to *you* I owe whatever promise the future has for me! It is *you* who have given me all the happiness I've had for years. It is *you* who have watched over, taken care of, me — *you,* the best friend any woman in this world ever had. It is *you* now who have saved my boy's honor. It is *you* who lift the weight off my shoulders, the weight off my heart! You! — you! — you!

[*She sinks sobbing on the bench. It begins to snow very quietly and slowly.*]

WARDEN [*all his love bursting out into his face and into his voice, cries*] Blanche! Blanche!

[*Leaning over her as if to protect her from her trouble and take her to his breast.*]

BLANCHE [*rising and looking straight into his eyes with a suddenly revealed great love in her own.*] Ned! —

[*They hold this position some moments, gazing into each other's eyes; then finally* WARDEN *makes a movement towards her, crying out more triumphantly, having read and realized her love for him.*]

WARDEN. Blanche!

BLANCHE [*moving a half step back from him*]. No —

WARDEN. No?

BLANCHE. Look — look, it's beginning to snow!

WARDEN [*very softly*]. What do you mean?

BLANCHE [*desperately*]. I mean to speak of anything except what is in your thoughts at this moment! Help me not to forget that no matter what he has done, Dick is still my husband.

WARDEN. You don't know all he has done!

BLANCHE. How not "all"? What else? Where is he?

[*With a sudden new alarm.*]

WARDEN. He has left you.

BLANCHE [*echoes*]. Left me? —

WARDEN. Mason is searching for him. He left a note at your house which Jess read; it was only one word "Good-by."

BLANCHE [*echoes again*]. Good-by! [*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming quickly nearer.*] What does it mean? You're hiding something from me! Tell me what else you know?

WARDEN. He left the house, but took something with him — something from a drawer in his room.

BLANCHE [*after a second's pause she whispers*]. His pistol?

WARDEN. Yes.

BLANCHE [*aghast, still whispers*]. Has he done it?

WARDEN. I don't know; I'm waiting word from Mason.

[*The sleigh-bells stop.*]

BLANCHE [*excited*]. But we can't

wait here doing nothing; we must go, too!

WARDEN. Mason is doing all that can be done; we'd better wait here.

[*He takes her hand in sympathy, but without suggesting the passion of a few moments before.* STERLING *enters hurriedly Left. He is wild with drink and jealousy.*]

STERLING. Drop my wife's hand!

[*They turn in great surprise.*]

BLANCHE. Dick!

[*Fright at his appearance is mingled with her surprise.*]

WARDEN [*at the same time as* BLANCHE]. Sterling!

[*They do not drop hands.*]

STERLING [*coming nearer, very strong*]. Drop my wife's hand! [*They do so quickly, not understanding yet.*] So I've *caught* you!

WARDEN [*angry*]. Caught us!

STERLING. Yes, I had my suspicions roused some time ago!

BLANCHE. Of what?

STERLING. *I* could go to the devil — what did *you two* care! I could go to State's Prison! All the better — *out of your way!*

WARDEN. You're speaking like a madman!

STERLING. I went back to my house this morning; my wife was gone — no message left where to! But I questioned the servant. She'd driven here! Why? Ha! [*A bitter half laugh; he turns to* BLANCHE.] *You've come here once too often!*

WARDEN [*very strong*]. Sterling!

STERLING [*To* WARDEN, *but ignoring his exclamation*]. Then I went to *your* house. *They knew* where *you'd* gone! You ought to train your servants better! *Both here!*

WARDEN. If you're not careful, I'll ram your insinuations down your throat.

STERLING [*jeers*]. "Insinuations?" I've caught you! I make no *"insinuations."* I tell you *both you're caught!* You're my wife's lover, and she's your damned mis — [*Interrupted.*]

WARDEN [*seizing* STERLING *by the throat*]. Don't you finish!

BLANCHE. Sh! — for Heaven's sake! [*To* WARDEN.] Let him alone; I'm not afraid of what he says.

[WARDEN *leaves* STERLING.]

STERLING. No, you never were a liar, I'll give you credit for that, — so confess the truth — you're his —

[*Interrupted.*]

BLANCHE [*excited beyond her control*]. Listen! And you shall have the truth if you want it! These years that he's been befriending me I never dreamed of loving him nor thought of his loving me. [DICK *sneers.*] *Wait!* No, not even the day my father was buried, when I learned outright you were *dishonest!*

STERLING [*surprised*]. What do you mean?

BLANCHE. What I say — I learned it then from a paper of my father's. I shouldn't have kept my knowledge to myself — I see that now; but I did, for your sake, not for love of you — the love went for good that day. But here, a moment ago, I realized for the first time that my old friend *did* love me, love me with an ideal devotion the noblest woman in the world might be proud of! I didn't tell him then I loved him, but now I take this chance, I *take it* GLADLY before you! — *forced by you!* I tell him now, what perhaps he has already guessed, I love him with all my heart — I *love him!* I LOVE HIM!

STERLING. Damn you both; then it's the *end* of *me!*

[*He pulls out a pistol and tries to put it to his temple.*]

BLANCHE [*cries out*]. Ned!

WARDEN [*seizes* STERLING, *catches his arm, and wrenches the pistol from him*]. So that's what you planned to do, is it — make a wretched scene like that?

[*It begins to snow more heavily.*]

STERLING [*in utter collapse and shame*]. Why did you stop me? I'm better out of the world. I'm crazy with shame. First I disgraced and now I've insulted — *degraded* — the only living thing I care for, — that's my wife.

[*A moment's pause.*]

BLANCHE [*speaks quietly*]. Come

back to the house. Mr. Mason is looking for you; he has something to tell you.

STERLING. I know — more bad news.

BLANCHE. No, good.

STERLING [*echoes*]. Good! [*Starting to go, he turns at the porch.*] I want *you* to know that *I* know I'm a rotten beast. [*He goes out Left.*]

WARDEN. You're going back *home?*

BLANCHE. *"Home!"* [*With a faint smile.*] I should hardly call it that.

WARDEN [*aside to her*]. You're not afraid?

BLANCHE [*half smiling*]. Oh, no! And my boy's there.

[*The thick falling snow almost hides them, but they are unconscious of it.*]

WARDEN. What's to be done?

BLANCHE. Wait; we'll see — we'll see — let it be something we could never regret. Good-by, Ned.

[*Giving him her hand.*]

WARDEN. Good-by, Blanche.

[*Kissing her hand very tenderly and almost with a certain kind of awe, as*

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS.

ACT IV

The following morning; at the STERLING'S; *the library; a warm, livable, and lovable room, full of pictures, photographs, and books; mistletoe and holly decorate everywhere. In the bow-window at back there is a large bird-cage with half a dozen birds in it. The furniture is comfortable and heavily upholstered. At Left there is a fireplace with logs ready, but the fire is not lit. There is a big table near the center, full of magazines, illustrated papers, and books. A big arm-chair is beside the table, and other chairs conversationally close. There is a table near the door at Right, piled with Christmas gifts, still wrapped in white paper; they are tied with many colored ribbons and bunches of holly. There are doors Right and Left. After the curtain rises on an empty stage,* RUTH *enters quickly; while she has her buoyant manner, she is, of course, more serious than usual. She carries a bunch of fresh violets in her hand. She looks about the room with a sort of curiosity. She is waiting for some one to appear. She takes up a silver-framed photograph of her brother which stands on a table and speaks aloud to it.*

RUTH. I'm glad you're spared this. [*With a long-drawn breath she places the photograph back upon the table and turns to greet* BLANCHE, *who comes in Right.*] Good morning, my dear.

[*She kisses her.*]

BLANCHE. Good morning. You've had my note? [RUTH *nods.*] Thank you. I wanted to see you before I saw any one else. You must help me decide, only *you* can.

RUTH. Have you seen your husband this morning?

BLANCHE. No. He sent word he was feeling ill, but would like to see me when I was willing.

RUTH. And you?

[*They sit near each other.*]

BLANCHE. I don't want to talk with him till I see more clearly what I am going to do.

RUTH. Mr. Warden told me last night all that happened at "The Hermitage." But on your ride home with Dick?

BLANCHE. We never spoke. [*She rises.*] Aunt Ruth, I am going to leave him.

RUTH [*rising*]. No!

BLANCHE [*walking up and down*]. Why not? *Everybody* does.

RUTH [*going to her*]. That's just it. *Be somebody!* Don't do the easy, weak thing. Be strong; be an example to other women. Heaven knows it's time they had one!

[MRS. HUNTER *enters Right.* BLANCHE *meets her.*]

MRS. HUNTER. Good morning, my poor dear. [*Going to kiss* BLANCHE.]

BLANCHE [*taking* MRS. HUNTER'S *hand and not kissing her*]. Good morning.

MRS. HUNTER. Clara's gone upstairs to see little Richard. Good morning, Ruth.

[*She adds this with a manner of being on the defensive.*]

RUTH [*dryly*]. Good morning.

MRS. HUNTER [*sitting by the table and looking at the picture papers*]. Isn't it awful! What are you going to do?

BLANCHE. I don't know, yet, mother.

MRS. HUNTER. *Don't know?* Absolute divorce — no legal separation! [*To* RUTH.] We're staying at the Waldorf.

[BLANCHE *sits discouragedly on the sofa.*]

RUTH [*sitting beside her*]. I shall advise against, and do everything in my power to prevent, Blanche's getting a divorce!

MRS. HUNTER. You don't mean to say you'll carry those ridiculous notions of yours into practice? — now that a scandal has come into our very family?

RUTH. Oh, I know selfish, cynical, and worldly people won't agree with me, and I pity and sympathize with Blanche from the bottom of my heart. [*Taking and holding* BLANCHE'S *hand.*] But I want her not to decide anything now; wait till the first blow's over, and then — well, then I feel sure she will do the strong, noble thing — the difficult thing — not the easy.

BLANCHE [*withdraws her hand from* RUTH'S]. *No,* you ask too much of me, Aunt Ruth; I can't do it.

RUTH. I say don't decide now — wait.

BLANCHE. I don't want to wait. I want to decide now and to cut my life free, entirely, from Dick's.

RUTH. You used to agree with me. I've heard you decry these snapshot, rapid-transit, tunnel divorces many a time. I've heard you say when a woman has made her bed, she must lie in it — make the best of her bad bargain.

BLANCHE. I always sympathized with a woman who sought a divorce in this state.

RUTH. Oh, yes, but *you can't,* can you?

BLANCHE. No, but I'm not strong enough to fight out an unhappy life for the sake of setting an example to other women — women who *don't want* the example set!

RUTH. Blanche, I counted on you to be strong, to be big —

BLANCHE [*with a voice full of emotion*]. But I love Ned Warden. He loves me — life stretches out long before us. Dick has disgraced us all. I don't love him — should I give *my* happiness and Mr. Warden's happiness for *him?*

MRS. HUNTER. Absurd! We all have a right to happiness if we can get it. I have chosen; let Blanche follow my example.

BLANCHE [*disgusted*]. *Yours?* [*Rises.*] Oh!

RUTH [*following up the advantage*]. Yes, Blanche, do you want to follow your mother's example?

BLANCHE. No! But the cases are not analogous!

MRS. HUNTER. Not what? You needn't fling any innuendoes at Mr. Trotter; it's he who said it was my duty to stand by you, advise you, and all that sort of thing. I'm not here to please myself! Goodness knows, a divorce court isn't a very pleasant place to spend your honeymoon!

BLANCHE. Thank both you and Mr. Trotter, mother; but I ask you to allow Aunt Ruth and me to decide this matter between us.

MRS. HUNTER. Trotter says *divorce* was *made* for woman!

RUTH. And what was made for man, please? Polygamy?

MRS. HUNTER. I don't know anything about politics! But I could count a dozen women in a breath, all divorced, or trying to be, or *ought* to be!

RUTH. And each one of them getting a cold shoulder.

BLANCHE. What of it if their hearts are warm — poor climbers after happiness!

RUTH. Believe me, dear, the chill spreads. You're going to be selfish?

MRS. HUNTER. She's going to be sensible.

[CLARA *enters Right.*]

CLARA. Hello, everybody! I just saw Dick coming out of his room and I cut him dead.

BLANCHE. Clara!

RUTH [*to* BLANCHE]. You've taken a certain responsibility upon yourself, and you can't shirk it.

BLANCHE. He isn't what I thought him!

RUTH. The day the sun shone on you as a bride, in God's presence, you said you took him for better for worse —

CLARA. Dear me, is that in it? The marriage service ought to be expurgated!

RUTH [*to* CLARA]. I'm ashamed of you.

CLARA. That's nothing new!

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth, let us talk some other time.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, if we are in the way, we'll go! [*Rises.*]

CLARA. Yes, come on, let's go to Atlantic City.

MRS. HUNTER. No, I'd rather go to Lakewood.

CLARA. Oh, pshaw, Lakewood's no fun! I'm surprised you don't say go to Aiken, North Carolina.

MRS. HUNTER. Mr. Trotter says we can't leave town anyway while Blanche is in this trouble.

BLANCHE. Mother, please discuss your affairs somewhere else.

RUTH. And if I may be permitted to suggest, you will find Mr. Trotter's advice always pretty good to follow. That young man has better qualities than we have suspected. I have something to thank him for; will you be good enough to ask him to come and see me?

MRS. HUNTER. He will not go to your house with my permission. I shall tell him you have never asked me inside your door.

CLARA. Mother, if you ask *me* — [MRS. HUNTER *interjects* "Which I don't," *but* CLARA *continues without paying any attention to the interruption.*] — I don't think Mr. Trotter is going to cry himself to sleep for your permission about anything!

MRS. HUNTER [*to* BLANCHE]. Good-by, my dear; if you want me, let me know; I'll be glad to do anything I can. I'm staying at the Waldorf.

CLARA. It's full of people from Kansas and Wyoming Territory come to hear the Opera!

RUTH. A little western blood wouldn't hurt our New York life a bit!

CLARA. Ah! Got you there! The west is the place where the divorces come from!

MRS. HUNTER [*laughs*]. What's the matter with Providence? I think Rhode Island tips the scales pretty even for the East!

BLANCHE. Please go, mother; please leave me for a little while.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, very well, good-by! [LEONARD *enters Right with a Christmas parcel, which he places on the table Right.*] Dear me, have you had all these Christmas presents and not opened them?

BLANCHE. It is only little Richard in this house who is celebrating Christmas to-day.

MRS. HUNTER. It's a terrible affair; I only hope the newspapers won't get hold of it. [*To* LEONARD.] If any women come here asking for *me* who look like ladies, don't let 'em in! They ain't my friends; they're reporters.

[LEONARD *bows and goes out.*]

CLARA. I'm awfully sorry, Blanche, I honestly am; but I think you'll have only yourself to blame if you don't strike out now and throw Dick over. Good-by!

[MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *go out Right.*]

BLANCHE. I wish *they* wouldn't advise me to do what I *want* to.

RUTH. Ah!

BLANCHE. But who do I harm by it? Surely, it wouldn't be for *his* good to be brought up under the influence of his father!

RUTH. If he saw you patiently bearing a cross for the sake of duty, can

you imagine a stronger force for good on the boy's character? What an example *you* will set him! What a chance for a mother!

BLANCHE. But my own life, my own happiness?

RUTH. Ah, my dear, that's just it! The watchword of our age is self! We are all for ourselves; the twentieth century is to be a glorification of selfishness, the Era of Egotism! Forget yourself, and what would you do? The dignified thing. You would live quietly *beside* your husband if not *with* him. And your son would be worthy of such a mother!

BLANCHE. And I?

RUTH. You would be *glad* in the end.

BLANCHE. Perhaps—

RUTH. Surely! Blanche, for twenty years Mr. Mason and I have loved each other.

[BLANCHE *is astonished. There is a pause.*]

[RUTH *smiles while she speaks, though her voice breaks.*]

You never guessed! Ah, well, your father knew.

BLANCHE. But Mrs. Mason is hopelessly insane; surely—

RUTH. A principle is a principle; I took my stand against divorce. What can you do for a principle if you don't give up everything for it? Nothing! And that is what I mean. To-day I am not sorry—I am happy.

[*There is another slight pause.* RICHARD *is heard upstairs singing a Christmas carol, "Once in Royal David's City," etc.*]

BLANCHE [*with great emotion*]. But if it breaks my heart—if it breaks my heart?

RUTH. Hearts don't break from the pain that comes of doing right, but from the sorrow of doing wrong! [*Neither woman speaks for a minute; in the silence* RUTH *hears* RICHARD.] What's that?

BLANCHE [*hearing now for the first time*]. Richard singing one of his carols.

RUTH. I'd forgotten it *was* Christmas.

[LEONARD *enters Left.*]

LEONARD. Doctor Steinhart is here see Mr. Sterling. Where shall I sh him, madame?

BLANCHE. Here; we'll go—

[*Risin*

LEONARD. Yes, madame.

[*He goes ou*

RUTH. Well? What are you going do?

BLANCHE. I'm *thinking*—

RUTH. May I come with you, or sh I—

BLANCHE. No, come.

[*The two women start to leave t room together Right, with th arms around each other. They me* STERLING, *who enters; he star they stop.*]

STERLING. I beg your pardon, I didn know you were here.

BLANCHE. We are going to my roo I am sorry you are not well.

STERLING. Oh, it's nothing, thank yo

RUTH. If we can do anything, let u know.

STERLING [*overwhelmed with sham bows his head*]. Thank you.

[*The women go out Right. At th same moment* DR. STEINHART *shown in by* LEONARD *Left.*]

DR. STEINHART. Good morning, Ste ling.

STERLING. Good morning, doctor; s down.

DR. STEINHART. No, thanks, I'm ver rushed this morning. What can I d for you?

STERLING. I've been drinking too muc for some time; I can't eat—my nerve are all gone to pieces. I've some- some business troubles, and I haven slept for a week.

DR. STEINHART. Is that all! Brac up, help yourself a little, and we ca soon make a man of you.

STERLING. I'm afraid it would tak more than a doctor to do that.

DR. STEINHART. Oh, come, we mus get rid of melancholy. Come and driv with me to 79th Street.

STERLING. No, I'm too worn out Look at my hand! [*Holds out a trem*

bling hand.] I tell you literally I haven't slept for weeks — I thought you'd give me some chloral or something.

DR. STEINHART. What? Now?

STERLING. Yes; I've tried sulphonal and all that rot; it doesn't have any effect on me. Give me a hypodermic —

DR. STEINHART. Nonsense! Come out into the air!

STERLING. I've *been* out.

DR. STEINHART. Good! Then try lying down again, and perhaps you'll go to sleep *now*.

STERLING. Very well, but give me something to take to-night in case I can't sleep then.

DR. STEINHART [*takes out a note-book and writes with a stylographic pen*]. Be careful what you eat to-day. How about this drinking — did your business trouble come after it began, or did the whiskey come after the business trouble?

STERLING. That's it.

DR. STEINHART. Um — [*Giving* STERLING *the paper which he tears out of his note-book.*] Look here, I've a busy day before me; but I'll look in to-morrow, and we'll have a good talk.

STERLING. Thank you. I say, what *is* this?

DR. STEINHART. It's all right. Sulphate of morphia — one-quarter-grain tablets.

STERLING. Isn't that very little?

DR. STEINHART. Oh, no; you try one, and repeat in an hour if it hasn't done its work.

STERLING. But you've only given me two tablets, and I tell you I'm awfully hard to influence!

DR. STEINHART. Two's enough; we don't give a lot of drugs to a man in a nervous condition like yours. Don't let them wake you for luncheon if you're asleep. Sleep's best for you. Good-by — pleasant dreams.

[*He goes out Left.*]

STERLING [*reads off the prescription*]. "Two one-quarter-grain tablets sulphate of morphia, Wm. B. Steinhart —" And in *ink!* Why didn't he write it with a lead-pencil? How can I make it more? Two — wait a minute! Two! [*Taking out his own stylographic pen.*] What's his ink? [*Makes a mark with his pen on his cuff.*] Good! the same! Why not make it twelve? [*Marking a one before the two.*] Just in case — I might as well be on the safe side!

[*He rings an electric bell beside the mantel, and waves the paper in the air to dry it.* BLANCHE *enters Right.*]

BLANCHE. I heard the doctor go. Is anything serious the matter?

STERLING. *If* it were my *body* only that had gone wrong, Blanche!

[LEONARD *enters Left.*]

[*To* LEONARD]. Take this prescription round the corner and have it put up.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

STERLING. And bring it to me with a glass of water.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out Left.*]

[BLANCHE *is still standing.* STERLING *sinks into a chair, and puts his head in his hands, his elbows on the table. He lifts his head and looks at her.*]

STERLING. I know what you're going to do; you don't have to tell me; of course you're going to divorce me.

BLANCHE. No.

STERLING. What!

[*His hands drop to the table; he looks her straight in the face, doubting what he hears.*]

BLANCHE [*looking back into his eyes*]. No.

STERLING [*cries*]. Blanche!

[*In a tone of amazement and joy.*]

BLANCHE. I give you one more chance, for your sake *only as my boy's father.* But — *don't make it impossible for me* — do you understand?

STERLING. Yes! I must take the true advantage of this chance your goodness gives me. I must right myself, so that people need not hesitate to speak of his father in Richard's presence. *And this I will do.* [*With great conviction he rises.*] I know I am at the cross-roads, and I know the way; *but* I don't choose

it for *your* reasons; I choose for my own reason — which is that, unfit as *I am, I love you.*

[*He speaks deliberately and with real feeling, bending over her.*]

BLANCHE. I tell you truly my love for you is gone for good.

STERLING. I'll win it back — you *did* love me, you *did,* didn't you, Blanche?

BLANCHE. I loved the man I thought you were. Do you remember that day in the mountains when we first really came to know each other, when we walked many, many miles without dreaming of being tired?

STERLING. And found ourselves at sunset at the top instead of below, by our hotel! Oh, yes, I remember! The world changed for me that day.

[*He sinks back into the arm-chair, overcome, in his weakened state, by his memories and his realization of what he has made of the present.*]

BLANCHE. And for me! I knew then for the first time you loved me, and that I loved you. Oh! how short life of a sudden seemed! Not half long enough for the happiness it held for me! [*She turns upon him with a vivid change of feeling.*] Has it turned out so?

STERLING. How different! Oh, what a beast! what a fool!

BLANCHE [*speaking with pathetic emotion, tears in her throat and in her eyes*]. And that early summer's day you asked me to be your wife! [*She gives a little exclamation, half a sob, half a laugh.*] It was in the corner of the garden; I can smell the lilacs now! And the raindrops fell from the branches as my happy tears did on father's shoulder that night, when I said, "Father, he will make me the happiest woman in the world!"

STERLING. O God! to have your love back!

BLANCHE. You can't breathe life back into a dead thing; how different the world would be if one could!

STERLING. You can bring back life to the drowned; perhaps your love is only drowned in the sorrow I've caused.

BLANCHE [*smiles sadly and shakes her head; the smile dies away*]. Life to me then was like a glorious staircase, and I mounted happy step after step led by your hand till everything *seemed* to culminate on the day of our wedding. You men don't, *can't* realize, what that service means to a girl. In those few moments she parts from all that have cherished her, made her life, and gives her whole self, her love, her body, and even her soul sometimes — for love often overwhelms us women — to *the* man who she believes, wants, *starves,* for her gifts. All that a woman who marries for love feels at the altar I tell you a *man* can't understand! You treated this gift of mine, Dick, like a child does a Santa Claus plaything — for a while you were never happy away from it, then you grew accustomed to it, then you broke it, and now you have even lost the broken pieces!

STERLING [*comes to her, growing more and more determined*]. I will *find* them, and put them together again.

BLANCHE [*again smiles sadly and shakes her head*]. First we made of *every* Tuesday a festival — our wedding anniversary. After a while we kept the twenty-eight of *every month!* The second year you were satisfied with the twenty-eight of April only, and last year you forgot the day altogether. And yet what a happy first year it was!

STERLING. Ah, you see I *did* make you happy once!

BLANCHE. Blessedly happy! Our long silences in those days were not broken by an oath and a fling out of the room. Oh, the happiness it means to a wife to see it is hard for her husband to leave her in the morning, and to be taken so quickly — even roughly — into his arms at night that she knows he has been longing to come back to her. Nothing grew tame that first year. And at its end I climbed to the highest step I had reached yet, when you leaned over my bed and cried, big man's tears, the first I'd ever seen you cry, and kissed me first, and then little Richard lying on my warm arm, and said, "God bless you, little mother." [*There is a pause.* BLANCHE *cries softly a moment.* STERLING *is silent, ashamed. Again she turns*

upon him, rousing herself, but with a voice broken with emotion.] And what a *bad* father you've been to that boy!

STERLING. I didn't mean to! That's done, that's past, but Richard's my boy. I'll make him proud of me, somehow! I'll win your love back — you'll see!

[BLANCHE *is about to speak in remonstrance, but stops because of the entrance of* LEONARD. *He brings a small chemist's box of tablets in an envelope and a glass of water on a small silver tray.*]

LEONARD. Your medicine, sir.

[*He puts it on the table and goes out Right.*]

STERLING. Thank you, thank you!

[*He takes the box of tablets out of the envelope.*]

BLANCHE [*going to him*]. *You don't* ealize why I've told you all this!

STERLING [*counting out the tablets*].)ne, two. To give me hope! To give ne hope!

[*He empties the other ten tablets into the envelope, twists it up, and throws it in the fireplace.*]

BLANCHE. No, no, just the opposite!

STERLING. Then you've defeated your nd, dear; you will stay here with me.

BLANCHE [*trying to make him realize he exact position*]. Opposite you at the able, receiving our friends, keeping up ppearances, yes — but nearer to you han that? No! Never!

STERLING. But you *will* stay?

[LEONARD *enters from Left.*]

LEONARD. Miss Godesby, Mr. Warden.

[*They enter.*]

[*All greet each other.* WARDEN *nods stiffly to* STERLING, *barely acknowledging his greeting.*]

MISS GODESBY [*to* STERLING, *purposely peaking with good-humored raillery to lieve the tension of the situation*]. 'ell, you're a nice lot, aren't you?

STERLING. I'm so ashamed! I'm so hamed!

MISS GODESBY. Oh, never mind that ow.

BLANCHE. I have no words to thank you with.

MISS GODESBY. Oh, that's all right. The truth is, I've made Warden bring me here, Sterling, for a bit of business. I had an emotional moment yesterday and went off my head a bit. I stand by what I said as to keeping quiet, but — well, I'm like any other old maid who hates dust on her mantelpiece — I'm fidgety not to make some sort of a bluff at putting this thing on a business basis.

WARDEN. Excuse me, Miss Godesby, I think Sterling ought to know the truth.

STERLING. *Now* what?

MISS GODESBY. Well, the truth is, my fool of a brother has kicked up an infernal row, and refuses to hold his tongue.

STERLING. Then I'm ruined after all!

MISS GODESBY. Wait, I've left him with Mr. Mason. I feel certain I can assure his silence if I can only show him some sort of an agreement to pay, an acknowledgment of the — the — affair, signed and sealed.

BLANCHE. Signed by whom?

MISS GODESBY. Your husband and yourself will do.

STERLING. But both names are worthless.

MISS GODESBY. Not as a point of honor.

STERLING. Ah! no, not my wife's.

MISS GODESBY. Nor yours to me. Come along!

[*She goes to the table with* STERLING, *and unfolding a paper gives it to him. He signs it.*]

WARDEN [*aside to* BLANCHE, *apologizing for his presence*]. She made me come — she wouldn't come alone; otherwise I should have waited till you sent for me.

BLANCHE. It's as well — I've decided. Oh, I wonder if I'm doing wrong.

[*Looking him straight in the face.*]

WARDEN [*looking back searchingly in hers to read the truth, but believing that she will certainly leave her husband*]. No, *you* can't go wrong! But I must warn you of one thing — I'm not any longer the controlled man I was.

MISS GODESBY. Come along now, Mrs.

Sterling, brace up and give me your name, and Warden, witness, please. [*They do so.*] Of course, my dears, I know perfectly well that legally this isn't worth the paper it's written on. [*Exchanging a serious and meaning look with* WARDEN.] But my idiot of a brother won't realize that, which is the point. One thing more — will you both dine with me next week, Thursday? [*There is an embarrassed pause, which, with quick intuition, she understands.*] Yes, you *will* — for *silence* gives consent! [*Laughing.*] Now, that's settled!

STERLING. What an awfully good sort you are!

MISS GODESBY. Thanks, not always — I've been a mucker more than once in my life! I must go [*Shaking hands with* BLANCHE.] and relieve Mr. Mason of my brother, or he'll be accusing me of inhuman treatment; more than one consecutive hour of my brother ought to be prevented by the police.

BLANCHE. You are very, *very* good.

MISS GODESBY. I think if you and I can get well over this, we'll be real friends, and I haven't many, have you?

BLANCHE [*takes her hand*]. You can count upon me and my boy as long as we live.

[*She impulsively but tenderly kisses her.* MISS GODESBY *is very much surprised, but moved.*]

MISS GODESBY [*half laughing, half crying, and pulling her veil down to hide her emotion*]. By George! I haven't been kissed by a woman for years! Good-by.

[WARDEN *starts to go out with* MISS GODESBY. BLANCHE *stops him.*]

BLANCHE. Wait one moment — I want to speak alone to Miss Godesby.

[MISS GODESBY *goes out Left.*]

BLANCHE [*aside to* STERLING]. You tell him; I cannot. Tell him the *truth.*

[*She goes out after* MISS GODESBY.]

WARDEN. Dick.

STERLING. Ned?

WARDEN. I have nothing to say to you, Sterling.

[WARDEN *looks away and whistles a tune to show his unwillingness to listen.* STERLING *speaks clearly so* WARDEN *shall hear.*]

STERLING. I have a message for you from my wife. [*There is a second's pause.* WARDEN *stops whistling and turns and looks at* STERLING.] She asks me to explain — to tell — to tell you a decision she has come to.

[*There is another pause.*]

WARDEN. Yes?

[*Anxious, at a supreme tension, and now a little alarmed as to the decision.*]

STERLING. She has decided not to leave my house.

WARDEN [*adds*]. *Yet!*

STERLING. *Ever!*

WARDEN [*losing his control*]. That's a lie!

STERLING. I couldn't believe it, either when she told me. It was her first word to me to-day. I said, "You are going to divorce me," and she answered, "No."

WARDEN. She's sacrificing herself for some reason — her boy!

STERLING. Never mind, she won't leave me; I have her promise, and I'll win back her love!

WARDEN. You fool! You can't win her back! She would never have loved me if you hadn't disillusioned, *dishonored* her! I'm not worthy of her, but I'll never dishonor her, and, please God, never disappoint her, and so I'll keep her love.

STERLING. Well, as to that, she decides to stay, leaving love out of the question.

WARDEN. And you'll accept that sacrifice! You don't even *love* her. You're only thinking of *yourself* now. Love, real love, forgets itself. You, after having spoilt half her life, are willing to spoil the rest, for *your own sake!*

STERLING. No, for the boy's sake, and her sake — to save a scandal — the world — [*Interrupted.*]

WARDEN [*beside himself*]. Oh, damn the world! It's *heaven* and *hell* you better think of. *Scandal!* It couldn't harm *her,* and the hurt it would do you is a small price to pay. Those whom *God* has joined — yes! but it was the devil bound her to you!

STERLING. Here! I've had enough! Look out!

WARDEN [*moves toward him*]. *You* look out — you sha'n't rob her of her happiness. You — a drunkard! A forger! A thief!

STERLING. *I'd keep her now if only to spite you!*

WARDEN. Hah! There spoke the true man in you! Would to heaven the old days of duelling were back!

STERLING. A brave wish, as you know they're not!

WARDEN. They fight in other countries still for their love and honor, and I'm ready here, now, if you are, with any weapons you choose! [STERLING *sneers.*] Sneer! But will you fight? We'll find a place, and something to fight with, or fists if you'd rather! You wouldn't kill me before I'd got you out of her way for good. Will you fight?

[*Coming closer to him.*]

STERLING. No!

WARDEN [*getting more and more enraged*]. If *you lose, you go away,* and set her free of your own will!

STERLING. *No!*

WARDEN [*losing entirely his self-control*]. What do you want to *make* you fight — will that?

[*He gives him a stinging blow in the face.*]

STERLING. Yes!

[*He springs toward* WARDEN *as* RUTH *and* MASON *enter Left. The two men stand rigid,* WARDEN *breathing heavily.*]

RUTH. Blanche, may I bring in — where's Blanche?

STERLING. I don't know.

MASON. Good morning, gentlemen.

[*There is no response.* WARDEN *is with great difficulty restraining himself. His lips are compressed tightly and his hands clenched.*]

RUTH. What's the trouble?

STERLING. I have just told Warden my wife's decision not to leave me.

RUTH [*showing her relief and satisfaction in her face, turns to* WARDEN]. You won't try to shake that resolve?

WARDEN [*unable to control himself*]. But I will! I *will* — I tell you all! I hardly know what I say or do! But look out for me, I'm desperate! I'm a torrent that's only let loose since yesterday, and now all of a sudden you try to stop me! But it's too late; I've got my impetus; the repressed passion of years is behind me; nothing can stop me — and God keep me from doing the wrong thing! I am determined to clear him out of the way of the happiness of the woman I love. [*To* RUTH.] Do you mean to say you approve of her decision? [RUTH *turns her head; he turns to* MASON.] Do *you?*

RUTH. No.

STERLING [*to* RUTH, *holding out his hand*]. You will stand by me, Aunt Ruth, and together we —

RUTH [*interrupting and refusing his hand*]. Oh, no.

STERLING. Don't you think I can win her love back?

RUTH. No.

STERLING. Won't you help me try?

RUTH. No. It would be useless.

WARDEN. Come with me to Blanche; I must speak with her.

[WARDEN *and* RUTH *go out Right.*]

MASON [*alone with* STERLING]. Go away and make your wife understand you are never coming back.

STERLING. But the loneliness, the misery, away — alone.

MASON. Kill them with hard work; *you have other heavy debts,* you know. I came to see you about this business of your acknowledgments to Miss Godesby and Miss Hunter.

STERLING. Later, later. To-morrow I will decide —

[*He motions him away.* MASON *goes to him and put his hand on his shoulder.*]

MASON. Decide well —

[*He hesitates a moment and then goes out Right.*]

STERLING [*watching him go*]. There's not one soul in this world who cares for me, and it's my *own fault.* [RICHARD *is heard upstairs again singing "Once in Royal David's City."* STERLING *lifts his head and listens.*] Yes, one little soul loves me, and it would be better for

him, too, if I went away. I'll go to sleep and see how I feel about it when I wake up. [*He moves the glass of water and takes out the box of tablets. He starts suddenly, but very slightly, and his muscles tighten.*] After all, why not end it all *now*, at once, without any more bother? [*He looks in the box, and glances up questioningly; then he remembers the fireplace where he threw the other tablets and looks across the room at the logs. He rises, goes over, and sees in the fireplace the twisted envelope which holds the other tablets. He bends over to pick it up; he stops short.*] No! Why shouldn't I try it, anyway? She, herself, gives me the chance! [*He rings the electric bell, and walking away from the fireplace, takes up with a trembling hand the papers left by* MASON; *he wipes the damp from his forehead with his handkerchief. To* JORDAN, *who enters Left.*] Light the fire quickly; I feel cold.

[*He sinks into the arm-chair, weak from the mental strain.*]

LEONARD. It's very warm in the house, sir.

STERLING. Do as I tell you — light the fire.

LEONARD [*looking for matches on the mantel, finds the box empty*]. There are no matches, sir; I must get one.

STERLING. No, don't go — here — here —

[*He gives him a match from his own box.* LEONARD *notices the trembling hand and suppressed excitement of* STERLING, *and involuntarily glances up, but quickly looks back to his work and strikes a match. The match goes out.*]

LEONARD. I shall need another match, please, sir.

STERLING [*with one in his fingers taken from his match-box, he alters his mind*]. I have no more. [*He puts away his match-box.*] Never mind the fire; get me a pint bottle of champagne.

LEONARD [*with a surreptitious side glance of curiosity*]. Very well, sir.

[*He goes out Left.*]

STERLING. That was funny; that was very funny! I wonder if it was accident, or if there's such a thing as fatality. [*He goes to the fireplace and picks up the twisted envelope.*] If not now — perhaps some other time — who knows? [*He thrusts the envelope in his vest pocket, and takes up the papers again from the table to look over them.*] I can't read these things! [*Throwing them down.*] The words mean nothing to me!

[*There is the sound outside of a cork being drawn.* LEONARD *enters with the champagne and a glass and places them beside* STERLING.]

LEONARD. Shall I light the fire now, sir?

STERLING. No, never mind now.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out Left.* STERLING *half fills the glass with champagne. He takes out the box of tablets and counts aloud.*]

STERLING. One, two, three, four — [*He puts all in the glass, dropping them as he counts. He hesitates, then quickly drops in two more and drinks quickly. The glass is empty. He sits by the table thinking a moment, then takes a piece of paper and makes ready his stylographic pen.*] Let me see; can I make it seem accidental; it would be so much less bother and trouble for them! [*He thinks a second, then writes.*] "I have accidentally taken an overdose of my sleeping draught. I have tried to call some one, but it's no use. I ask only one thing, that you forget my sins, wipe out their memory with my name. I want my boy to change his name, too." [*He hesitates a moment, and then scratches that sentence heavily out.*] No, I won't say that. [*He waits a moment.*] God in heaven, what wouldn't I give for one friendly word just now! Some one to sort of say *good-by* to me — take my hand — even a *servant!*

[*He looks about him, showing signs of drowsiness. The door Right bursts open.* STERLING *quickly hides the letter in his inside pocket as* WARDEN *comes in.*]

WARDEN. My hat! Where's my hat!

[*He looks about for it.*]

STERLING [*quietly*]. Ned?

WARDEN. My hat, I say! Where's my hat? [*Looking.*]

STERLING. Ned!

[*Something in his voice arrests* WARDEN'S *attention.*]

WARDEN. What? [*He looks at him.*] What's the matter —

STERLING. Nothing — I'm half asleep, that's all — the reaction — I'm worn out and I've changed my mind —

WARDEN. How do you mean?

STERLING. I'm going away for good — that's the best I can do; I want you to forgive me — *could* you? What do you say? Forgive me for everything! For the sake of the old schoolboy days —

WARDEN. When are you going?

STERLING. To-day. Will you say good-by to me and wish me well on my journey?

WARDEN [*speaks without sympathy*]. You can count on me always to help you in any way I can. You can still retrieve a good deal if you're strong enough.

STERLING. I know what -a beastly friend I've been, and yesterday was more than any man would stand, but forgive that, too, will you? I've always been a bad lot!

WARDEN [*goes to him and speaks, with the sympathy of a man for a child coming into his voice.*] No, a weak lot; that's been your ruin, Dickie. I'll see you again before you go.

STERLING. No, I'm going to sleep as long as I can now, and I don't want any one to wake me up; but when I do wake, I shall have other things to do. This is good-by.

WARDEN. Well, good luck! [*He starts to go. The two men look at each other, and finally* STERLING *gets the courage to hold out his hand.* WARDEN *hesitates a moment, then shakes it.*] Good luck!

[*He goes out Left.* STERLING, *who has been growing more and more drowsy, as soon as he is alone, goes with difficulty to the door and locks it. He is so drowsy that he leans against the door for a moment; then he starts to go back to the table, but is unable to get there and sinks on the sofa half way between the table and the door. His eyes close, but suddenly he starts violently and tries to rise, but cannot, crying out faintly.*]

STERLING. Good God — the money! I forgot the money — who'll pay my debts? Ah, this is a fitting climax for my life — the weakest, dirtiest thing I've done — [*He gets the letter from his pocket and holds it in his hand; the light of the afternoon grows slowly dim, like his fading sight and senses. He murmurs twice in a faint, drowsy voice.*] Coward! Coward!

[BLANCHE, *in the hall outside Right, calls his name.*]

BLANCHE. Dick!

[STERLING'S *body relaxes and sets. The letter drops from his lifeless hands.* BLANCHE *enters with* RUTH, *followed by* RICHARD, *who rides a stick with a horse's head and wears a soldier's cap.*]

RICHARD. Merry Christmas, father!

BLANCHE [*going toward the sofa*]. Dick!

RICHARD. Merry Christmas, father!

BLANCHE. Sh! Father's asleep.

[*They steal back toward the other door when* WARDEN *enters Right.*]

WARDEN. Oh, you are here! I went down into the drawing-room where I left you.

BLANCHE. Sh!

[*She points to* STERLING, *who lies apparently asleep. They speak in lowered voices.*]

WARDEN. Yes, I have a message for you from him.

[*Looking at* RICHARD *and* RUTH.]

RUTH [*who understands*]. Come, Richard, I haven't seen your tree yet.

[*She goes out Right with* RICHARD.]

WARDEN [*to* BLANCHE]. Give me your hand. [*She does so wonderingly.*]

WARDEN [*softly, with a man's tenderness in his voice*]. He is going away for good.

BLANCHE. Away?

WARDEN. For good.

BLANCHE [*slowly, withdrawing her*

hand.] For good? [*She looks over toward* STERLING, *and then back to* WARDEN.] What does he mean?

WARDEN. We will know when he wakes.

THE CURTAIN STEALS SOFTLY DOWN.

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Other plays of similar character:

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The Thunderbolt (A. W. Pinero)
The Ravens (Henri Becque)

QUESTIONS ON "THE CLIMBERS"

1. What elements of melodrama do you find in *The Climbers?*

2. What weaknesses do you find in the plot?

3. Comment on the realism of the opening act.

4. Why does the author introduce a snow-storm in act three?

5. Do any characters seem untrue to life?

6. Is the title appropriate?

GEORGE ADE

George Ade was born in Kentland, Indiana, on February 9, 1866. He attended Purdue University, which says Thomas Masson, did him probably less harm than might have been done to him anywhere else he might have gone; for Purdue in the eighties was so thoroughly provincial and securely removed from all external influences that Mr. Ade was able to preserve his Americanism intact. Such might not have been the case had he gone to an Eastern university, where a more effective contact with European cultural forces might have diverted his interest from the Mid-western scene. After leaving the university Mr. Ade worked for a while on a Lafayette, Indiana, newspaper, and later went to Chicago to join a school friend, John T. McCutcheon, on a Chicago journalistic venture. He tells us he had to compete on the same page with the humorous "Column" of Eugene Fields — "only a thin black line separated them." But Mr. Ade attracted his readers and soon found his distinctive field — the modern Fable.

His *Fables in Slang* are unique in literary history. Ostensibly humorous short stories or anecdotes with inexplicably appropriate capitalizations, they are in reality genuine satires on contemporary life. His frank sarcasm — he levels his laughs at himself as well as at the rest of us, thus avoiding bitterness and acrimony — and his caustic mirth are sometimes overlooked because of the sheer brilliancy and audacity of his phrasing. George Ade knows the Middle West, its people, its folk-ways; underneath the verbal fantastics of his fables there is essential truth.

This knowledge of scene and people he has in a way brought to his comedies, although in his endeavor to tell an interesting, humorous story, he is prone to substitute the type for the individual, to slip over the boundaries of humor into farce, and to use his satire a little sparingly. Mr. Ade wrote his comedies with one end in view: to entertain and amuse contemporary audiences. He borrowed ready-made dramatic forms and adjusted his peculiar talents to their molds. He succeeded well in what he attempted, and it is absurd to criticize his failure to achieve the high comedy of Congreve or of Maugham, the brilliancy of Shaw, the whimsicality (How Barrie hates this word!) of Barrie; his aim was a legitimate one — to amuse without sacrificing intelligence and a keen sense of the ridiculous. Playgoer and critic of the first years of the twentieth century applauded the plays and accepted them gratefully at their face value.

George Ade has never given evidence that he considered himself a great playwright. His success as a fabulist overshadowed his success as a dramatist, and his self-confessed disinclination toward writing plays led him to abandon dramatic composition at a time when there was still a demand for his plays. He either realized that he had exhausted this particular vein, or became tired of writing plays and, sensibly, stopped. The best of his plays, which were all written between 1902 and 1914, are *The County Chairman* (1903), *The College Widow* (1904), *Just Out of College* (1905), and *The Fair Coed* (1908).

In his plays are no unusual twists of plot, no "problems," no striving for significance. There are small town people — types we can easily recognize — presented with their amusing peculiarities foremost, and serving for a satire much more genial than that of the Fables. Yet he exposes with a good-humored laugh the little pretensions, hypocrisies, compromises of the average man. Better than many other playwrights (or moving picture directors) Mr. Ade has succeeded in catching the real flavor of campus life, especially the college of a quarter of a century ago. *The Fair Coed* and *The College Widow* come nearer than most plays in creating the collegiate atmosphere, only unsatisfactory perhaps in so far as his characters are types and not individuals. He exposes good-naturedly the absurd emphasis on athletics, and sketches with a gently satirical pen the benevolent though stupid alumnus, the bluffer, and the grind.

Mr. Ade's comedies may be not for all time but of an age, yet they are valuable as examples of the better American comedy of twenty-five years ago, and as not unsuccessful attempts of a fiction writer in a field that interested him for a few years.

THE COLLEGE WIDOW
1904

BY

GEORGE ADE

CHARACTERS

BILLY BOLTON — *A half-back*
PETER WITHERSPOON, A.M., PH.D. — *President of Atwater College*
HIRAM BOLTON, D.D., LL.D. — *President of the K. and H. Railway*
"MATTY" MCGOWAN — *A trainer*
HON. ELAM HICKS — *Of Squantamville*
"BUB" HICKS — *A freshman*
JACK LARRABEE — *The football coach*
COPERNICUS TALBOT — *Post-graduate tutor*
"SILENT" MURPHY — *Center rush*
"STUB" TALLMADGE — *A busy undergraduate*
TOM PEARSON — *Right Tackle*
OLLIE MITCHELL, DICK MCALLISTER, "JIMSY" HOPPER — *Students*
DANIEL TIBBETTS — *Town marshal*
JANE WITHERSPOON — *The college widow*
BESSIE TANNER — *An athletic girl*
FLORA WIGGINS — *A prominent waitress*
MRS. PRIMLY DALZELLE — *A grass widow — reliable chaperone*
LUELLA CHUBBS, BERTHA TYSON, CORA JENKS, SALLY CAMERON, RUTH AIKEN, JOSEPHINE BARCLAY — *Town girls*

Students, Members of the Football Team, Spectators at the Game, other Town Girls, etc.

ACT I: The campus in front of the main building of Atwater College.
ACT II: One end of the gymnasium.
ACT III: Athletic field back of the grand stand.
ACT IV: In front of the Grand Central Hotel.

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THE COLLEGE WIDOW

ACT I

SCENE.—*The campus in front of the main building, Atwater College. It is the afternoon of the opening day of the Fall term, early September. College building* R. *with entrances and step. At rise of curtain several students and* "MATTY" MCGOWAN, *the trainer, are standing or sitting near door, as if waiting for some one to come out. The students are new men who are candidates for the football team.* MCGOWAN *wears a jersey sweater of light texture and lateral stripes. His suspenders are over the sweater, which is tucked inside of his trousers. His appearance suggests the working costume of trainer such as one sees around race tracks or pugilistic quarters. He carries a wooden bucket and a big bottle of rub-down mixture. Almost immediately after the rise of curtain* OLLIE MITCHELL, *carrying a book, enters and crosses toward main building. He wears a soft hat with an indented top, very short coat, baggy trousers reefed at bottom — the typical college makeup, somewhat exaggerated. He is smoking a bulldog pipe and walks leaning forward from the hips.*

OLLIE. Hello, Matty.

MCGOWAN. Hello, Ollie.

OLLIE. Where's Jack?

MCGOWAN. Inside there — tryin' to square it with the head of the works.

OLLIE. Who — Doc?

MCGOWAN. You'll never get no winnin' team here if that old boy don't keep out of it.

OLLIE. Well, of course he's the president of the college and ought to have some rights. But he *does* interfere too much.

MCGOWAN. Size up this outfit they just handed me. [*Indicating green squad.*] I'm supposed to have 'em in a month so they'll go out an' fight wildcats. And not one of 'em knows enough to pick up the ball. [*Boys listen to him abashed.*] If they fell out of a boat, they wouldn't hit the water.

[JACK LARRABEE *comes from building. Straight, natty costume.* LARRABEE *is a graduate of the college who is acting as coach. The students defer to him, and he carries himself with authority. He comes from building hurriedly and somewhat agitated.*]

LARRABEE. I knew it — confound it!

[*Boys are interested and gather around him.*]

MCGOWAN. Put up a holler, did he?

LARRABEE. Says the faculty won't permit any man to play on the team unless he's up in his class work.

OLLIE [*gloomily*]. Aw, piffle, piffle!

MCGOWAN [*angrily*]. What's class work got to do with playin' on the team?

LARRABEE. I told him that the only way to give Atwater a standing in this state was to go out and win games.

OLLIE. That's right!

LARRABEE. We'll have to make the best of it. [*Addressing the green squad. Boys rise and gather around him.*] Boys, you've got work ahead of you — but if you are looking for glory and have no fear of death, each one of you may wear a great big "A" on his chest some day. Get out and fuss around with that ball for a while.

[MCGOWAN *throws ball to one of the green men,* NUMBER ONE, *who drops it and picks it up again, and the squad moves* L. *slowly,* MCGOWAN *watching them.*]

McGOWAN [*watching them off*]. That's the punkest collection of farm-hands I ever tackled!

LARRABEE. What's the use of trying to build up a team if the faculty won't help out?

OLLIE [*a chant, to the tune of "Wait for the Wagon"*]

Speak to the widow,
Speak to the widow,
Speak to the widow,
The lady with the pull.

LARRABEE [*sharply*]. Let up!

McGOWAN. What's the gag?

LARRABEE. Ollie is striving to be comic. He means Dr. Witherspoon's daughter.

McGOWAN. She ain't no widow.

OLLIE. College widow. Buries one every commencement. [OLLIE *makes a sign to* McGOWAN *and nods toward* LARRABEE *to indicate that he is one of the victims.* McGOWAN *nods wisely.*] She's the reason that we have more students than they have over at Bingham.

[*Enter* STUBBY.]

STUBBY. Hello, Jack.

LARRABEE. Hello, there, Stubby.

STUBBY [*shaking hands*]. Put 'er there, old man. How are you, anyway? Lookin' finer'n silk. Hello there, Ollie. And the human McGowan, too!

McGOWAN [*looking at him coldly*]. I was hopin' you wouldn't come back this year.

STUBBY. Now, don't talk like that, because I've got a present for you. I've got a baby boy for the line.

LARRABEE [*delightedly*]. What! Honestly?

[*This news has startling effect on all three of the men.*]

McGOWAN. Mebbe we don't need a couple of husky ones!

STUBBY [*enthusiastically*]. This fellow can throw a horse. Listen! I saw him down in Springfield, workin' in a foundry, and I convinced him that he needed a college education.

LARRABEE. How about Prexy?

McGOWAN. Will they stand for it?

OLLIE. More work for the widow.

STUBBY. It's all right. He's goin' to take a special art course — four hours a week. [*They all laugh.*]

LARRABEE. Did you bring him along?

STUBBY. Did I? Say, he was afraid of the cars! Stopped to rubber at the observatory — never saw one before. Wait till you see — [*Crosses to* L., *calling.*] Look out, Murphy! Don't walk on that flower bed! [*Holding up one finger.*] Here you are!

[MURPHY *enters. He is a ponderous young fellow, strong and bulky. A bashful and awkward young giant. He wears a new suit of store clothes — does not know what to do with his hands.*]

LARRABEE. Immense!

McGOWAN. Oh, wow!

OLLIE. Looks all right to me.

STUBBY. Gentlemen, Mr. Murphy, my entry for center.

[MURPHY *makes an awkward move toward his hat.*]

McGOWAN [*aside to* LARRABEE]. I'll find out if he's any good. How are you, young fellow?

[*Puts his forearm against* MURPHY *and begins crowding him back.* MURPHY *surprised and then angry. Bristles up.*]

MURPHY. What's the matter with you?

[*Pushes* McGOWAN *and assumes threatening attitude.*]

McGOWAN [*elated — turning toward the boys*]. Say, he's all right!

[*Grabs* MURPHY *by the hand. The other three laugh.*]

[*Enter* BESSIE, TANNER, DICK McALLISTER, TOM PEARSON *and* JIMSEY HOPPER *in tennis playing costume. They are bareheaded and carrying racquets. As* BESSIE *enters,* STUB, OLLIE, LARRABEE *raise their hats.* McGOWAN *and* MURPHY *touch theirs.* BESSIE *is talking as they come.*]

BESSIE. I tell you it's no use. I can't get the hang of that backstroke. [*Sees* STUB.] Wh-a-at! Stubby Tallmadge!

STUB. The regular little Bessie! [*Shakes hands with her.*]

BESSIE. See! [*Calling attention to the badge on her waist.*] I've been wearing it all summer.

STUB. You are certainly looking finer than a new red wagon. How are you, anyway?

BESSIE. About two pounds overweight, but I can take that off. Mr. McGowan has promised to give me some work with the gloves. Feel! [*She brings up her arm and he feels of her biceps and shakes his head admiringly.*] You know the long hole at Glenview — made it in four yesterday. I'm going to win that cup this year.

STUB. And I'll be your caddy. [*She shakes her head.*] All I want to do the rest of my life is to walk about ten feet behind you and carry your clubs.

BESSIE. You know what I've always told you — only one thing prevents me from getting perfectly foolish about you — if you'd get on the team.

STUB. No. One champion is enough for any family. Two years ago I joined the squad and all the players kept tackling me — thought I was the ball.

[*She crosses, laughing, and sees* MURPHY *up stage.* MCGOWAN *is measuring him, chest, waist, etc., as others look on.*]

BESSIE. Jimminy crickets! For the team?

STUB [*proudly*]. My discovery. That fellow eats glass and tenpenny nails!

BESSIE. He's a darling. Keep him around here until I can bring the girls to look at him. [*Exits.*]

[MURPHY *and the others come down stage as* DANIEL TIBBETTS, *the new town marshal, enters.* TIBBETTS *has fierce black mustache, large star on his coat and carries a cane.*]

STUB. How about it, Jack?

LARRABEE [*pleased*]. I think he'll do.

TIBBETTS [*breaking in — boys have not observed him up to this point*]. Boys! [*They turn, startled.*] I've got a few words to say to you. My name is Daniel Tibbetts. I'm the new town marshal.

PEARSON. What are your troubles to us? We have troubles of our own.

TIBBETTS [*very authoritatively*]. Want to let you know one thing — I'm goin' to preserve order in this town. You stay in at nights and behave yourselves and we'll git along all right. If you don't — [*Glaring at* STUB.]

STUB. Well, why do you look at *me?*

LARRABEE [*conciliatingly*]. Keep cool, Mr. Tibbetts. This is a quiet Presbyterian college —

TIBBETTS. I know all about that. I'm here to give you fair warnin'.

OLLIE. Mr. Tibbetts!

TIBBETTS. Well, what is it?

OLLIE. What kind of a policy do you carry — accident or life?

[*Boys laugh.*]

TIBBETTS. You can't scare me.

[TIBBETTS *exits.* STUB *takes* MURPHY *by the arm and leads him toward college.*]

STUB. Come on, Murphy! I'm goin' to put you up against Prexy. [*They start in.*] Remember what I told you. [*Earnestly.*] You attended high school and had to quit on account of your eyesight failin' you, and now you're down here to take a special course in art — a-r-t — art.

[MURPHY *nods silent assent and they pass into building. Boys laugh as* STUB *and* MURPHY *exeunt. They sit in doorway or on fence, assuming indolent attitudes, some reading, one bouncing a tennis ball, etc.*]

LARRABEE. That fellow ought to be a corker — if he'll scrap.

MCGOWAN. I guess he'll scrap — if he was educated in a foundry.

PEARSON. How is the new squad, Matty?

MCGOWAN. Oh, fine! Been trainin' on pie all summer — huckleberry pie! Anything more, Mr. Larrabee?

LARRABEE. Yes — just remind them — any man who smokes a cigarette after to-day hasn't got a chance on earth.

MCGOWAN. Let me catch one of 'em burning a student's lamp and I'll beat him to a pulp. [*Exits.*]

LARRABEE. McGowan's the best trainer we ever had.

OLLIE. He ought to be good. He was with Benny Leonard one whole season.

[FLORA WIGGINS *enters. Flash make-up. Is chewing gum. Carries a large hand-purse with initials on it.*]

PEARSON. Ah, Miss Wiggins!

[FLORA *crosses and the boys whistle "Razzle Dazzle," keeping time with her as she walks. She turns and glares at them defiantly. As she turns the students all turn their backs on her.*]

FLORA [*coming back*]. Is *that* so? It's too bad a lady can't walk across the campus without a lot of you Charley boys trying to get new with her!

[*The boys turn back again.* STUB *enters hurriedly from building.*]

STUB. He's in there talkin' to Prexy. I guess —

[*Sees* FLORA *and starts to go back into building.*]

FLORA. Mr. Tallmadge!

[*Frigidly and with emphasis.*]

STUB [*with mock politeness*]. Yes, Miss Wiggins?

FLORA. Can I speak to you for a moment?

STUB. I consider it a pleasure and a privilege.

FLORA. You probably remember —

STUB. I do. Four weeks at four-fifty per — eighteen dollars. I'm very strong on mathematics.

FLORA. You promised ma-mah that you'd send it.

STUB. Didn't you get it?

FLORA. We did not.

STUB. What would you do if I took that money right out of my pocket and paid you?

FLORA. I'd probably drop dead. And I suppose you're going to save my life. Huh? I've met so many college comedians I ain't got a laugh left in my system.

STUB. Well, Flo, I'll tell you. [*Picking imaginary piece of lint off her sleeve.*] I don't happen to have that much money on me at present. I've been buying a lot of chemicals for the laboratory.

FLORA. Humph!

STUB. But — the minute I get the eighteen, me to you, quick in the hand.

[*He pats her on the shoulder.*]

FLORA. Look here, Mr. Herbert Fresh — [*Pushing him away.*] I don't need no massage treatment! You keep your hands off o' me!

STUB. All right. If you're goin' to take that view of the matter, but I like you, Flora. The only reason I stayed at your mother's boarding house so long was to be near you.

FLORA. And you got next to me — for eighteen.

STUB. Eighteen, that's the amount. It is graven upon the very tablets of my memory.

FLORA. And ma-mah gets it, or we report the whole thing to President Witherspoon.

STUB. You'll get the eighteen, Flora.

FLORA. You *bet* we'll get it!

[*Exits.*]

OLLIE. What's the argument, Stubby?

STUB. No argument at all. She wanted me to come back and board with her mother this year.

[*One of the boys says, "Back up!" Another chuckles — another whistles. This scene is interrupted by the voice of* MRS. PRIMLEY DALZELLE, *heard outside.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. Come on, girls. Don't get out of my sight. I promised to look after you.

[*She enters, followed in by* LUELLA CHUBBS, BERTHA TYSON, SALLY CAMERON, RUTH AIKEN, JOSEPHINE BARCLAY, *an attractive bevy of town girls.* MRS. DALZELLE, *being the first on, greets the young men effusively. The girls go to each of the young men — they chat and shake hands.*]

LARRABEE. Mrs. Dalzelle, I'm delighted.

MRS. DALZELLE. Jack Larrabee! Dear old Jack! Welcome to Atwater once more. [*Kisses him.*] And Mr. Tallmadge — too! Handsomer than ever! [*Kisses him.*] Tom Pearson — I declare! You're all here together. [*She kisses* PEARSON.] And Ollie Mitchell! How do you do? [*Kisses him.*] Oh,

Dickie McAllister! You bad boy! You promised to write to me. [*Kisses him.*] Mister Hopper — too! Bless him! [*Kisses* HOPPER. *As she is making the round of boys, girls follow, shaking hands. 'Boys have their hats in their hands.* MRS. DALZELLE *standing between* PEARSON *and* STUB, *with her arm around each on each side and upon shoulder, prattles on.*] Oh, girls, you don't know how happy I am to have my boys back again! It's been such a pokey summer. I don't know what would become of a lonely married woman if she didn't get out with the young folks once in a while.

[BESSIE *enters.*]

BESSIE. Have you all been kissed boys? If you have, I suppose we can say that the Fall term has been opened in the regulation manner.

MRS. DALZELLE. Bessie, don't be sarcastic — I'm a foolish old chaperone and the boys don't mind it.

[*Kisses first* STUB *and then* PEARSON.]

BESSIE. That's just what worries us girls — they don't seem to mind it. [*To* STUB.] Where is he?

STUB. Wait here, folks, and I'll lead him out.

[*Exits into building as* BESSIE *turns and waves her tennis racquet.*]

BESSIE. Hurry up, Jane!

LARRABEE. Jane! [*Startled.*]

PEARSON. Who is it — Miss Witherspoon?

BESSIE. Yes. She couldn't keep up with me — got on high heels. [*With one accord the young men, led by* LARRABEE, *move off to meet* JANE. LARRABEE *crosses in front of her — all the other young men behind him and off quickly.*] Can you beat that? I come out here and play tennis with them until I'm black in the face, and the minute she shows up they forget I'm on the campus.

MRS. DALZELLE [*going over and seating herself on seat by tree*]. Girls! [*Excitedly.*] Did you notice — she's wearing Mr. Larrabee's Sigma Theta pin?

BESSIE. That's nothing. She's been wearing somebody's college pin for the last five years. Her shirtwaists are so full of holes that they look like openwork.

SALLY. It's simply wonderful the way she strings them along.

JOSEPHINE. I wish I knew how. I'll bet I've given away twenty sofa pillows and I'm lucky if I have a caller a week.

MRS. DALZELLE. Girls, girls! Don't you know the secret of her abiding popularity? She keeps them guessing.

SALLY. Guessing?

MRS. DALZELLE. She holds every man at arm's length — he thinks that tomorrow evening she will have her head on his shoulder, but it is always — tomorrow evening.

BESSIE. Mrs. Dalzelle, why don't you try that system?

MRS. DALZELLE [*laughing*]. Bless you, I'm married. If I followed that method, they wouldn't pay the slightest attention to me.

BESSIE [*whistles*]. Look at that! Isn't that enough to make a girl squiggle-eyed?

[JANE *and the boys enter* R. LARRABEE, *on one side, carries her parasol and* PEARSON *walks on the other side. Others trailing closely behind.*]

JANE [*laughing*]. No, no, no! Really you must not ask me to go to father on any more football business.

PEARSON. But he doesn't seem to realize the situation.

LARRABEE. Bingham has had men out all summer looking up new players.

MRS. DALZELLE. Jack! Don't be foolish. When the time comes the team will get everything it wants. It always does.

[STUB *and* MURPHY *come from building.*]

STUB. Brace up, Murph! Ah, Miss Witherspoon! May I present my friend, Mr. Murphy?

JANE. Mis-ter Murphy. Charmed, I am sure.

[*She extends her hand to* MURPHY, *and the other girls crowd in behind her. Ad lib. introducing done by* STUBBY. *Girls crowding about* MURPHY.]

BESSIE. Mr. Murphy, I'm delighted.

OLLIE. [*to other boys*]. If he can stand off that rush line, we needn't be afraid of Bingham.

BERTHA. Girls! [*Waving them back, she photographs* MURPHY, *much to his embarrassment.*] Thank you.

JANE. Are you going to take the classical or the scientific course, Mr. Murphy?

STUB. [*standing alongside* MURPHY]. He's going to take a special art course. He's just crazy about art.

[*Aside to* MURPHY, *nudging him.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. Oh, Mr. Murphy! Have you been to the museum to see the mastodon?

STUB. No, he hasn't seen it yet.

OLLIE. He thinks it's something to eat.

JANE. Then you must come. [*To other men.*] You'll excuse me, won't you, while we take Mr. Murphy to see the mastodon?

ALL THE BOYS [*removing hats*]. Certainly.

STUB. Go and look at it, Murph. It's bigger than you are.

[MURPHY *and all the girls exeunt into building.*]

PEARSON. Stub, your friend is a little shy on conversation.

STUB. A man that weighs two fifteen in condition doesn't have to converse.

[BOLTON *enters. He is a bluff, brusque business man of the Middle West type. He is of the West and not Wall Street.*]

BOLTON. How do you do, young gentlemen?

ALL. Good day, sir. How do you do? etc. [*Rather surprised.*]

BOLTON. Is President Witherspoon's office in this building?

PEARSON. Yes, sir.

BOLTON. And this is the old Main Building?

PEARSON. Yes, sir; built in 1850.

BOLTON. Looks smaller than it used to — been a good many changes in thirty years.

LARRABEE. Indeed. You were here thirty years ago?

BOLTON. I guess yes. We used to play baseball right where the observatory stands now. Had to pitch underhand.— [*Indicating.*] Score usually about forty to twenty-five. Catcher used to take the ball on the first bounce.

STUB. Git out!

BOLTON. Fact! Never knew anything about football then. Used to choose up forty or fifty a side — and kick one of these big rubber affairs. Then, when we wanted to be real devilish, we'd play croquet!

STUB. What was your class, may I ask?

BOLTON. Oh, I never attended here — simply come over to play ball. I was a student at Bingham.

[STUB *crosses to* R.]

BOYS [*in unison, disappointed and contemptuous*]. Oh!

[*Then join in a chorus led by* STUB.] Oh, we won't do a thing to Bingham! Oh, we won't do a thing to Bingham! Oh, we won't —

BOLTON. Well, what *did* you do last year? Eleven to six.

PEARSON. The referee was against us.

BOLTON. Eleven to six.

STUB. [R.C.]. This year we'll eat 'em up!

BOLTON. Young man, have you got any money that says you'll eat 'em up this year?

STUB. [*taken back*]. Well, I haven't much with me.

MCALLISTER. Go on, Stub! Don't let him bluff you! Here's five.

[*Slips* STUBBY *bill.*]

BOLTON. I'm not dealing in any chicken feed. [*Taking out card-case.*] What's more, I don't ordinarily believe in gamblin' with children.

STUB. My, but you're just full of conversation to-day!

BOLTON. But — if your parents and guardians think that Atwater's goin' to win that Thanksgiving game, let 'em rake up a thousand dollars and they'll find a certified check at my New York office to cover it. Here's my card.

[*Hands it to* PEARSON.]

STUB. Who is it — Charley Schwab?

PEARSON [*reading*]. Hiram Bolton — President N. & H. Railway Company. [*Handing card to* STUB.] Great Scott!

BOLTON. That's what I think of Bingham's chances. [PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON *comes from building.*] Now, if you boys want cigarette money, go out and cover that check.

WITHERSPOON. Hiram Bolton —

BOLTON. Hello there, Pete!

[*At word "Pete," students explode with laughter.* WITHERSPOON, *coming down steps, rebukes them.*]

WITHERSPOON. Restrain yourselves, young gentlemen. [*Crossing to* BOLTON *and shakes hands with him heartily.*] Hiram, my dear old friend, I am delighted to see you. [*Turning to the students.*] Young gentlemen, I want to introduce to you Hiram Bolton, D.D., LL.D., one of our great captains of industry, who by his magnificent gifts to our sister institution of learning, Bingham College, has made himself beloved and honored by all friends of higher education.

OLLIE. Now, boys, three rousing cheers for Mr. Bolton.

[*All the students, without making a sound, go through the pantomime of three "rahs."*]

WITHERSPOON. Nothing of the sort!

[*Indignant.*]

BOLTON [*very much amused at all this*]. Don't mind them, Peter. Had a little tilt with 'em before you came out. [*Looking at watch.*] Now, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to get through my business here in a jiffy. My private car is down here on the siding and I've got to hustle up to New York and catch a steamer to-morrow morning.

WITHERSPOON. Ah! A little recreation trip!

BOLTON. Recreation — nothing! I'm interested in a jerk-water railroad out West. It don't connect with a main system and it's no earthly account, so we've made it a separate company, and I'm going over to London to float the stock.

WITHERSPOON. Ah, my dear Hiram, always money — money!

BOLTON. Well, Peter, I have to make money. I've got a Baptist college on my hands. [*Chuckles.*]

WITHERSPOON. Mr. Talbot will be here to meet you soon. While we're waiting I want to show you our mastodon — there's something you haven't got at Bingham.

[*Taking him by arm and leading him over to college steps.*]

BOLTON [*as they go in*]. Don't blow about it or I'll have to buy one for 'em next year.

[*They enter building.*]

LARRABEE. So that's old Bolton!

STUB. Does Rockefeller stunts over at Bingham.

OLLIE. Every time he puts up a new building they give him another degree.

STUB. D.D., LL.D. — can you beat that?

MCALLISTER. Fresh fish!

[COPERNICUS TALBOT *comes, followed by the* HON. ELAM HICKS *and* "BUB" HICKS. TALBOT *is a mild-mannered and rather eccentric young bookworm with spectacles and clerical makeup.* HICKS *is a county dignitary. The son is a bewildered country "jay." His clothes are too small for him. He wears a low felt hat with a buckle on the side and carries a telescope valise. Two students enter from college and join the others in group.*]

TALBOT. Good morning, Mr. Larrabee.

LARRABEE. Hello, Talbot.

TALBOT [*to* HICKS *as the boys stand by, interested and amused*]. The structure to our immediate front is the Main Building.

HICKS [*to* BUB *loudly*]. He says this is the Main Building.

[*Pointing with an umbrella.*]

BUB. [*terrified*]. Yes, sir.

TALBOT. The structure at our left with the hemispherical dome is the Astronomical Observatory.

HICKS [*to* BUB — *loudly*]. He says that building over yonder with a turnip on top of it is the 'bservatory.

BUB. Yes, sir.

STUB. [*to* HICKS *and* BUB]. And anything you don't like we can have changed.

TALBOT. I shall inform President

Witherspoon that you are here and desire an audience with him. Hicks is the name?

HICKS [*full of importance*]. The Honorable Elam Hicks of Squantamville — member of the State Senate.

STUB. Oh, mercy!

TALBOT [*as he enters building*]. Yes, quite so.

OLLIE. Mr. Hicks, I'll introduce myself. I am Professor Slivens. I teach umptorology.

[*Shaking hands with him.*]

HICKS. How do you do, sir? Glad to meet you.

OLLIS [*introducing* STUB]. This — this is Professor McGuffy. He teaches Skiology.

[STUB *crosses to him with a great deal of swagger.*]

HICKS. Glad to know you.

[*They shake hands.*]

STUB. How old is the squab?

HICKS. The squab? [*Doubtful.*] If you mean Bub, there, he's goin' on eighteen.

STUB. By ginger, he doesn't look that old, does he? Let's see his teeth.

[*Takes hold of* BUB *and opens his jaw.* BUB *frightened and indignant — backing away.*]

BUB. What in Sam Hill are you tryin' to do?

[MCGOWAN *enters.*]

MCGOWAN. Say, I've got the biggest piece of news —

STUB. I'll bet one of the new men caught the ball.

MCGOWAN. Now don't try to kid.

LARRABEE. What is it, Matty?

MCGOWAN. Wait till you hear it. We're havin' a little easy practice out there — passin' the ball, and Jackie Thompson sees a guy standin' over on the side lines an' he says, "I think I know him." He goes over, and, sure enough. He says to this guy, "What you doin' here?" and the fellow says, "I'm on my way to Bingham to play a few lines of football." And who do you think the guy is?

STUB. Dempsey?

MCGOWAN. Now, don't get funny! I'll tell you who it is. Bolton of Minnesota.

LARRABEE. You don't mean it!

MCGOWAN. I knew you'd holler.

LARRABEE. Then Prexy's old friend is his father.

STUB. No wonder he wanted to bet a thousand.

PEARSON. How good is this Bolton?

OLLIE. Say, you ought to read the papers.

LARRABEE. Walter Camp put him on the All-American team.

MCGOWAN. Come over and take a peek at this fellow. I left him talkin' to Jack. [*All start to leave.*]

STUB [*going off*]. He's got his nerve — comin' round here.

LARRABEE. Oh, that's all right. I wish he'd stay here.

OLLIE. Well, speak to the widow. She can arrange anything.

[*Boys laugh off stage.*]

HICKS. I want you to understand one thing, Bub — you're here to get an education and not to cut up didoes — the way them boys do.

BUB. I believe I'll go back home with you.

HICKS. You'll stay here — that's what you'll do — too blame lazy to work. You've *got* to get an education or you can't be a lawyer. You remember what I told you about stayin' in your room every night?

BUB. Yes, sir.

HICKS. No skylarkin' around, stayin' out till 'leven o'clock — smokin' cigarettes — partin' your hair in the middle.

BUB [*meekly*]. No, sir.

HICKS. And don't you learn to play no ukulele — that'll ruin any young man.

BUB. Yes, sir.

HICKS. I'm goin' to allow you a dollar a week to spend — but don't squander it. Do you understand?

BUB. Yes, sir.

[TALBOT *and* BOLTON *come out from building.*]

TALBOT. Mr. Hicks! President Witherspoon is waiting for you in his office at the end of the hall.

HICKS [*crossing in front of them,* BUB

follows and at foot of steps HICKS *turns and takes off* BUB'S *hat, adjusts his coat and then goes in*]. All right. Come on, Bub.

BUB [*following*]. I'd a good deal rather be at home.

[*Both enter building.*]

BOLTON [*watching them as they go in*]. Now, Mr.—

TALBOT. Talbot.

BOLTON [*offering him cigar, which he refuses*]. Mr. Talbot, no need wastin' much talk on this deal. The pay's satisfactory—you know what you've got to do—take him over to Bingham and whenever he can spare any time from football, you make him study a little.

TALBOT. What class does he enter?

BOLTON. Well, he's been a freshman for three years out west. He's gettin' used to it now. I s'pose we'd better make him a freshman.

TALBOT. What course, may I inquire?

BOLTON. I don't care what he takes so it ain't botany. Of all the idiotic—Here, I'll tell you about my own case. Over thirty years ago I went to Bingham College, to please my mother. I lasted till the Spring term. Then a long-whiskered professor came to me with a common, ornery yellow dandelion, and says, "I want you to find out the scientific name of this." I says, "I don't care a continental *what* the scientific name is. I'm a full-grown man and I don't propose to waste my time pickin' dandelions to pieces." So they fired me.

TALBOT. Really?

BOLTON. I went out west—joined a surveyin' gang—got into the railroad business. Well, I've always been so grateful to Bingham College for savin' me from a professional career that I've put up three or four buildings for them.

TALBOT. I can hardly understand your position, Mr. Bolton—you are opposed to collegiate training and yet you have endowed Bingham College.

BOLTON. Oh, colleges do some good—they keep a good many light-weights out of the railroad business. But there ain't any money in a college education. Look at Pete Witherspoon. He was a smart boy—workin' now for three thousand dollars a year.

TALBOT. Ah, but the triumphs of scholarship!

BOLTON. What are they? The best he's got is a Ph.D. and I'm a D.D., LL.D.—clean up half a million a year besides. [BILLY *comes in.*] Your college presidents don't get that much.

BILLY. Well, Father, did you find your old side-partner?

BOLTON. Yes, I did, and here's Mr. Talbot, the man that'll keep you from studyin' too hard.

[BILLY *laughingly approaches* TALBOT.]

BILLY. Glad to know you, Mr. Talbot. Guess we'll get along all right.

[*Shakes hands.*]

TALBOT. I anticipate only pleasant relations.

[STUB *enters, followed by* PEARSON *and then all the other college men.*]

BOLTON [*to* BILLY]. From now on you paddle your own canoe. I'm goin' to say "So long" to Pete and then hike for my train.

[*As he finishes speech he moves toward doorway, looking at watch.*]

BILLY. Don't worry about us.

[BILLY *gives* TALBOT *a friendly slap on the back as* BOLTON *exits into building.*]

STUB. Mr. Bolton.

BILLY. Yes, sir.

STUB. Excuse me for butting in, but ain't that a Kappa Delta pin you're wearing?"

BILLY. Yes, I'm a Kappa Delt.

[STUB *throws back his coat to show badge on vest.* BILLY *rushes to him and gives him the "grip," both laughingly.*]

STUB. My name's Tallmadge. This is Brother Pearson.

BILLY. Brother Pearson, I'm mighty glad to meet you.

PEARSON. Same to you, old man. Is this your first visit to— [*Girls begin coming out of building.*] Say, don't overlook this.

[*All the girls except* JANE *and* MRS. DALZELLE *come out with* MURPHY *and join boys.* FLORA *enters.*]

STUB. What do you think of 'em?

BILLY. They're all right.

STUB. But wait till you see the queen of the human race.

FLORA. Mr. Tallmadge!

STUB. Oh, gosh! [*Aside to* BILLY.] Don't pay any attention to this one. She's a ringer.

[WITHERSPOON, HICKS *and* BUB *come out from building, followed by* JANE, MRS. DALZELLE *and* BOLTON.]

FLORA. Ma-mah says—

STUB. Flora! Forget it for a while.

WITHERSPOON. Miss Wiggins!

FLORA. Yes, sir.

WITHERSPOON. This is Mr. Hicks, regarding whom I telephoned you. His son will board with your mother.

HICKS. Four and a half a week, you said?

FLORA [*gazing fixedly at* STUB]. Yes, sir; four and a half a week.

WITHERSPOON. You will find it comfortable and homelike.

HICKS. It ought to be good—it's steep enough. Come on, Bub.

BOLTON. Well, Peter, I'm on my way.

MRS. DALZELLE [*following him*]. Oh, Mr. Bolton, you should stay longer. You haven't seen half of the college.

BOLTON. Can't do it, madam—business trip. Bill, you and Mr. Talbot can get the evening train over to Bingham.

BILLY. All right, Father.

TALBOT. I shall immediately collect my impedimenta. [*Exits* L.]

WITHERSPOON [R.C.]. How I envy you the trip! London, so rich in historical associations—and the Royal Academy, the Museum, the Abbey—

BOLTON. To my notion the whole town is a museum. Why, they don't know they're alive—

[BERTHA *approaches him and just as he has his hand in the air, she interrupts him.*]

BERTHA. Don't move, please. That pose is so characteristic. [BOLTON, *surprised, holds position as she points camera and snaps it.*] Thank you.

BOLTON. Don't mention it. [*Everybody laughs.*] I thought the Sunday papers were after me again. Billy!

BILLY. Pleasant voyage, Father.

BOLTON. That's a joke—I'll be sick all the way—but I need the money. [*Takes a check from his leather card-case.*] Here! [*Handing* BILLY *check.*] I guess that'll carry you through.

BILLY [*glancing at it as he puts it away*]. That's plenty—for a man in training. You're off, are you?

[*Shaking hands.*]

BOLTON. I'm off to do up the English. Good-bye, everybody.

[*Exits briskly.* JANE *remains on steps, regarding* BILLY *with interest. He has not seen her yet.*]

WITHERSPOON [*putting his hand on his shoulder*]. A wonderful man, your father, Mr. Bolton. The same—as a boy—a most energetic, forceful character.

BILLY. I've heard him speak of you often—the time you both ran away and—had that awful affair when the police—

WITHERSPOON. Perhaps it would be better to make no reference to that here. We have in our museum a most remarkably articulated skeleton of the *mastodon arvarnensis*. I dare say you have studied geology.

BILLY. Yes, if it comes in the freshman year.

WITHERSPOON. I beg pardon!

BILLY [*correcting himself*]. Oh, geology—certainly!

WITHERSPOON. The museum is in the Main Building. [BILLY *starts to follow him* R. *into the building.* JANE *is still on steps. Her father sees her.*] Oh, Jane! Jane, may I present Mr. Bolton, son of my old friend, Hiram Bolton? [*To* BILLY.] This is my daughter, Jane.

[JANE *crosses to him and extends her hand—he is diffident.*]

BILLY. How do you do, Miss Witherspoon?

JANE. Mr. Bolton, I am charmed to meet you.

WITHERSPOON. I am taking him in to show him the mastodon. This way, Mr. Bolton.

[*Goes in, leaving* BILLY *standing alongside of* JANE.]

BILLY [*crosses to steps and then turns to* JANE]. Say, what is a mastodon?

JANE. It is a kind of an elephant.

BILLY. Oh! [*Comprehending.*] Much obliged. [*Tips his hat and goes in.*]

LARRABEE. You know who he is, of course?

JANE. Of course.

STUB. And he's going to Bingham! Oh, help, help, help!

LARRABEE. Unless we head him off.

JANE. What a very rash suggestion. How *can* we head him off?

STUB. Mebbe after he sees the mastodon he'll want to stay.

LARRABEE. This is no time for low comedy. I mean it.

JANE. But, Jack Larrabee, his father brought him all the way from Minnesota to attend Bingham.

LARRABEE [*meaningly*]. And his father sails for Europe to-morrow.

MRS. DALZELLE. Jack, stop beating around the bush and speak out. You want Jane to snare the innocent youth and keep him here, don't you?

LARRABEE. I want him on the team. I don't care how we get him.

JANE. Well, what can I do?

ALL THE BOYS [*except* LARRABEE]. Oh-h-h—

STUB. Jane, take this from me. You know more about students than your father knows about psychology.

JANE. Why, Mr. Tallmadge! I don't believe that's a compliment.

BESSIE. I'll tell you what. Get him to stay over for the faculty reception to-morrow night. [*Other girls buzz approval.*] And we'll all get around him and tell him what a great man he is and—

MRS. DALZELLE. Listen, all of you. He isn't going to play at Bingham if Jane can help it. Let's turn the young man over to her—

JANE. No. Mrs. Dalzelle, you take him. [*Making a curtsey—laughing.*] You've had more experience than I've had.

BESSIE. I vote for Jane. Mrs. Dalzelle would up and kiss him the first crack out of the box, and probably he would become frightened and run away.

MRS. DALZELLE [*warmly*]. Have you ever seen any of them run away?

JANE. Very well, fellow conspirators. Is it the sense of this meeting that Atwater needs a half-back?

[*General assent.*]

LARRABEE. I should say so.

JANE. And you are agreed that Mr. Bolton is that half-back? [*General assent.*] Very well. I shall urge our distinguished visitor to remain over for the faculty reception—and we'll all be nice to him, and who knows— But I must say that he seems to be a very meek and dutiful son, and I have no doubt that his heart is already given to Bingham.

STUB. And another thing. She doesn't need any help.

[*Taking* BESSIE *by the arm—exit, followed by others.*]

GIRLS. Why, Mr. Tallmadge! [*Another.*] You mean thing! [*Another.*] The idea! [*Another.*] Well, you're complimentary!

[*All exeunt except* LARRABEE. JANE *is laughing and evidently entering into the spirit of the adventure.*]

LARRABEE. Jane, I told you I'd come back this year.

JANE. We're delighted to see you—we need a coach. We simply must win this year.

LARRABEE. I came back on your account.

JANE. Oh, Jack! [*Reprovingly.*] Be careful! You came back because you love football.

LARRABEE. I thought if I could come back and give Atwater a winning team I'd stand a better chance with you.

JANE [*refusing to take him seriously*]. You mustn't come back after you've been graduated and laid away, or I'll lose my title of widow. [*Laughing.*]

LARRABEE. I'm serious.

JANE. Please don't worry about so many things at once. What we want is to get a football team that can play football.

LARRABEE. It would be a terrific feather in my cap if we could induce this young Bolton to stay here.

JANE. I induced you to stay, without

trying. Think of what may happen to poor Mr. Bolton if I exert myself.

LARRABEE. By George, you keep a man tied in a hard knot. Look out! Here they come.

JANE [*looking toward doorway*]. Father is still explaining the mastodon.

WITHERSPOON [*as they come out*]. This particular specimen, I believe belongs to the Pliocene period.

JANE. Father!

WITHERSPOON [*aroused*]. Yes?

JANE. Mr. Larrabee is waiting to speak to you about the team.

LARRABEE. Yes — I —

WITHERSPOON [*testily*]. Do you know, Mr. Bolton, this craze for pugilistic sports is demoralizing our institutions.

BILLY. Oh, I hardly think so. Do you know, I never heard of Atwater until it scored against Cornell two years ago.

WITHERSPOON. Oh, my dear young friend, you, too, are possessed of this madness. Well, come along, Mr. Larrabee, I suppose we shall have to give the team whatever it wants.

[WITHERSPOON *exits followed by* LARRABEE, *who looks back to* JANE *and gives a final encouraging glance.* BILLY *is well over* R. *with his back turned to them, so that he does not see this byplay. Lights gradually change to sunset glow.*]

JANE. Shall we follow along, Mr. Bolton? You're interested in football, I believe.

BILLY. Sorry, but I have to remain here to meet my keeper.

JANE. Your keeper?

BILLY. Mr. Talbot!

JANE. Oh! [*Laughing.*] You're taking Mr. Talbot away to Bingham?

BILLY. Not my idea — father's.

JANE. I almost feel as if I knew you. Your father and my father were boys together.

BILLY. Your father has been very kind to me. Showed me the mastodon.

JANE. Yes. That's the prize attraction at Atwater.

BILLY. I don't believe it.

[*Comes nearer to her.*]

JANE. No? [*Looking at him.*]

BILLY. I like this place.

JANE. If you're going to Bingham you shouldn't have seen Atwater at all. Now you'll be discontented.

BILLY. It's on father's account. It's a Baptist school. His mother was a Baptist. He's a kind of Baptist, by proxy.

JANE [*laughing*]. He has done a great deal for Bingham, hasn't he?

BILLY. Miss Witherspoon, he simply slathers his money on that school. First he gave them a theological hall, then a chemical laboratory, then an assembly hall —

JANE. And now a half-back.

BILLY. Exactly. A newspaper out West that doesn't like father very well said he was trying to tip his way into Heaven.

JANE. I do wish he'd try the Presbyterian route. We need a few things over here — laboratories, assembly halls —

BILLY. Half-backs?

JANE [*laughing*]. Yes, we can always use them.

BILLY. I'm sorry father's not a Presbyterian.

JANE. You'll find it very dull over at Bingham.

BILLY. Indeed? I understand that the President is an old bachelor —

JANE. You'd like it so much better over here — you'd be among your fraternity men — You're a Kappa Delt, aren't you?

BILLY. Why shouldn't I be — it's the best frat in the — Oh, I beg your pardon. I see you're wearing a Sigma Theta pin.

JANE. Yes. It belongs to Mr. Larrabee.

BILLY. Larrabee? Oh — here just now?

JANE. An Atwater man — last year's class — coaching the team.

BILLY. Oh! [*Coldly.*]

JANE. Did father speak to you about the faculty reception?

BILLY. He didn't speak about anything except the mastodon.

JANE. It's to-morrow night — in the gymnasium.

BILLY [*jokingly*]. All the new students come, I believe?

JANE. In their best bibs and tuckers.

BILLY. Music by the college orchestra?

JANE. Yes — and dancing.

BILLY. Well, you *are* very gay — for Presbyterians.

JANE. You'll stay over? Bingham can spare you for a day or two.

BILLY. Any special inducements?

JANE. The first dance.

BILLY. That *is* an inducement, but — [*Hesitating.*] I don't know Mr. Larrabee — but — what would you say to taking off that Sigma Theta pin and wearing my Kappa Delta badge to-morrow night?

JANE [*laughing*]. Mr. Bolton, your father and my father were boyhood friends.

BILLY. That hasn't got anything to do with it — but go ahead.

JANE. Besides, you're a celebrity.

BILLY. Am I?

JANE. And there are probably other good reasons — so I'll do it.

BILLY [*excited and pleased*]. Honestly?

JANE. There's my hand.

[*Puts out her hand.*]

BILLY [*takes her hand*]. Say, do you know, that's perfectly bully of you.

[TALBOT *enters with queer-looking valise, a shirt-box wrapped with heavy cord, a large card stuck with butterflies, and a compound microscope.*]

TALBOT. Mr. Bolton, we have exactly eleven minutes in which to traverse the mile intervening between us and the railway.

BILLY. By George, Mr. Talbot! I'm sorry to have put you to all this trouble, but the fact is — I'm going to remain here for the faculty reception.

TALBOT. Your father intimated a desire —

BILLY [*emphatically*]. Father's on his way to Europe.

JANE. Mr. Bolton wanted to see the town and the college, so I'm going to take him for a drive.

[*Opening parasol.*]

TALBOT [*dazed*]. Oh, very well.

JANE. Come, Mr. Bolton.

[*He joins her and they go off as he is talking.*]

BILLY. I tell you, Miss Witherspoon, the Kappa Delt fellows will appreciate what you're doing for them. It's perfectly bully of you!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. — *One end of the gymnasium. Gymnastic apparatus moved back against walls and suspended overhead. The walls are draped with the college colors, cherry and white. Three doorways. One at* R. *leads to men's dressing-room. One at* C. *leads to women's dressing-room. Wide door at* L. *leads to dancing floor. Up stage is a table on which is a punch-bowl filled with lemonade. Very tiny cups on table. Behind the table the supply of cream (bricks) and cake, from which* FLORA *conducts her operations. Down stage there are small tables, not enough to clutter up the stage.* AT RISE *of curtain,* PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON, *in antiquated evening clothes (suggestion of Henry Clay period), and* JANE, *in a fetching but not very expensive evening gown, are at* R. *of* C. *and down stage, "receiving" line of new students, some in evening clothes and some painfully made up in "store clothes."* JANE *stands at* R. *of her father, who shakes hands with each student and presents him to the daughter.* MURPHY, *in evening clothes too small for him and a black handkerchief folded across his breast inside of his waistcoat, is in line at rise of curtain. Also* BUB HICKS, *in a black suit, white bow tie and hair plastered down — a picture of the dressed-up and uncomfortable country boy.* STUB PEARSON, OLLIE, MCALLISTER, HOPPER, LUELLA CHUBBS, BERTHA TYSON, SALLY CAMERON, RUTH AIKEN, JOSEPHINE BARCLAY. FLORA WIGGINS

in a costume rather elaborate for a waitress—ruffled apron, rhinestone jewels, etc.—presides at lemonade table. The men, with the exception of the sprinkling of green students, should be in correct and rather ultra evening clothes, long-tailed dress coats, three-button white waist-coats of extreme cut—some with bows on their dancing pumps.

WITHERSPOON. Order, please, young gentlemen, order— You are welcome to these halls of learning. [MURPHY *has been standing* R. *in front of* PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON. BERTHA TYSON *is with him and is trying to hold him back. This business momentarily disconcerts* WITHERSPOON, *but he continues.*] You are here in search of intellectual culture. The upbuilding of the spiritual— [MURPHY *stamps his foot and* STUB *crosses quickly to* L. *of him and protests with him in pantomime. The doctor is again somewhat disturbed, but goes ahead.*] —side of man's nature. You are welcome! Now I have a little treat in store for us. Miss Luella Chubbs has kindly consented to recite "Rum's Maniac"!

LUELLA [*makes an awkward bow and curtsey—then with uplifted arms she proceeds*]

"Stay, jailor, stay!
And hear my woe!
He is not mad who kneels to you—"

[*On second line all the students and town girls begin to laugh and talk. It gets so loud that she is interrupted and* PRESIDENT WITHERSPOON *has to call them to order again. He motions her to proceed and she begins again as before with a bow. This time the noise is getting very boisterous and* STUB *motions to one of the larger boys to lift him so that he may reach switch which controls the arc lights. He turns them off and the stage is in semi-darkness. Laughter and good-natured confusion.* LUELLA *sits in chair and leans on table, crying.* TALBOT *tries to console her.* DR. WITHERSPOON *crosses to her also and pats her on the shoulder. As soon as lights are out,* DANIEL TIBBETTS *enters from men's dressing-room.*]

DANIEL TIBBETTS. Who put out them lights? Who put out them lights?

[*By this time one of the students has turned the lights on again.*]

STUB. Officer, do you want to know who did that?

TIBBETTS. That's what I want to know.

STUB. There's the guilty man.

[*Pointing to* BUB. *Everybody laughs.*]

BUB [*after laugh subsides*]. No, I didn't, nuther!

TIBBETTS [*as he moves toward door*]. Well, I'll find out who put them lights out.

[*Exits. Everybody laughs.*]

MRS. DALZELLE [*coming from ladies' dressing-room*]. Jane, dear— [JANE *kisses her.*] Your new gown is a perfect dream.

JANE. Sh-h! It isn't a new one. It's the old one with a few things done to it.

MRS. DALZELLE. I don't care. It's *simply a love.* [*Aside.*] Am I spotted? That's the stingiest little mirror in that dressing-room!

[*Using handkerchief on her nose.*]

JANE. You look charming.

MRS. DALZELLE [*sits*]. Is he here?

JANE. Who?

MRS. DALZELLE. I *know* there are several, but I mean Mr. Bolton.

JANE. He's in there— [*Indicating with fan.*] Some of the freshmen are now touching the hem of his garment.

MRS. DALZELLE. Is he beginning to like Atwater?

JANE. Very much—but his father—

MRS. DALZELLE. Father is now out on the bounding billows. [*With a movement of the rolling waves.*] And water—so I have been told—is a nonconductor of parental authority.

PEARSON. Mrs. Dalzelle, I hope you've saved one dance for me.

MRS. DALZELLE [*rising and coming to him* C.]. Why, you blessed child! I'm not here to dance. I'm here to look after these girls.

[*Puts her arm around him and leads*

him to a group at L. *of* C. *The boys greet her effusively.* WITHERSPOON *watches her and crosses, meeting* JANE, *who is following behind* MRS. DALZELLE.]

WITHERSPOON [*who has been talking with various groups*]. Jane — one moment. [*Looking over at* MRS. DALZELLE, *who is standing in a chummy attitude with two of the boys.*] Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps Mrs. Dalzelle is a trifle too motherly with the young men?

JANE. Why, Father! She's our regular chaperone — she's been married five years.

[*She half sits on table — adjusts his tie.*]

WITHERSPOON. I understand that she has a husband — but I've never seen him.

JANE. He's in California — they didn't get along well together.

WITHERSPOON. Indeed! [*Blandly.*] There shouldn't be any domestic friction — so long as he remains in California.

[BESSIE TANNER *out from* L. *through palms. She wears an evening gown with low neck and short sleeves. Her arms are tanned to the elbow and she is tanned above neck-band.*]

BESSIE. Doctor Witherspoon!

WITHERSOON [*turning*]. Yes?

BESSIE. Please start up the music. It's only three hours until midnight. We won't have any time to dance at all.

WITHERSPOON. Certainly, if you wish it. I hardly approve of dancing at these college functions. But there is such an insistent demand I — I —

BESSIE [*crossing over to* JANE]. Where is he?

JANE. Where is who?

BESSIE. Who! I wish I could hypnotize 'em the way you do.

JANE. Why, Bessie!

BESSIE. I don't think I'll be much of a hit with the boys to-night. Look at me. Look like the half-and-half girl in the circus, don't I? I wish I'd either kept out of the sun or else taken off a few more things.

JANE. My dear child, you're the picture of rosy health. Men like the athletic type —

BESSIE. Yes, on posters — but it's the fluffy girl with the parasol that gets 'em in the long run. Gee! I feel funny. I don't know whether I'm a blonde or a brunette.

[LARRABEE *steps out from doorway, looks back to assure himself, and then comes over, smilingly holding out his hand to* JANE.]

LARRABEE. Oh, say, you're great! [*Taking her hand.*] He's in there — combed his hair three times. Hello, Bessie!

BESSIE. Oh, good! You knew me, did you?

LARRABEE. Certainly. [*To* JANE.] I hope — [LARRABEE *seeing the college pin on her gown —*] Hello! Kappa Delt — [*Comprehending.*] Oh, I understand —

JANE. Yes, Mr. Bolton's. Why not? One of the conditions — that and the first dance — and then all the other dances. [*Laughingly.*]

LARRABEE [*rather piqued*]. He doesn't want much.

BESSIE. He's a good half-back. He's advancing the ball every minute. [*Music begins — two-step.*] There goes the music! Where's Mr. Tallmadge? We don't want to miss a minute of it.

[*All this very excitedly. She goes up stage and gets him by hand. They romp off together. Others sort into couples and drift off. Last of all the couples to go off to the dance,* BERTHA TYSON *drags* MURPHY *from entrance. He limps all the way off. When off, enter* BILLY *from dressing-room.* JANE, LARRABEE *and* FLORA *at table, and* BUB HICKS *seated discontently at* R., *are the only ones left on the stage when* BILLY *comes out from dressing-room.*]

BILLY. Oh! [*Seeing* JANE.] Not too late, am I?

JANE. Just in time. You know Mr. Larrabee?

LARRABEE. Oh, yes.

[*Trying to be amiable.*]

BILLY. Met him yesterday. Not dancing, Mr. Larrabee?

LARRABEE. Not this one.

BILLY. Well, we don't want to miss it, do we?

[*Gives* JANE *his arm. She is carrying a bouquet.*]

JANE. I mustn't forget to thank you for the flowers. They were such a surprise.

FLORA. Surprise! Huh!

BILLY [*as they exeunt*]. I didn't know what you liked. I took a chance on American beauties.

[LARRABEE *watches them off.*]

FLORA. Has he cut you out, Mr. Larrabee?

LARRABEE. Seems so, doesn't it?

FLORA. Well, you ought to know her by this time. She's had a new fellow every year since I can remember, and some say—

LARRABEE. Do they? Well, never mind about that. [*Going* L.]

[FLORA *miffed. On last speech* MCGOWAN *to doorway at* R. *During following scene with* LARRABEE, FLORA *is busy at table.*]

MCGOWAN. Mr. Larrabee!

LARRABEE. Hello, Matty! Come in.

[MCGOWAN *comes inside. He is in his good clothes.*]

MCGOWAN. I don't want to cut in on this thing. But somebody's got to keep an eye on these new fellows. I don't want 'em dancin' here all night and eatin' a lot of junk.

LARRABEE. I'll get them away at ten-thirty.

MCGOWAN. I was talkin' to Bolton back in the dressin'-room.

LARRABEE. Well?

MCGOWAN. He's all right. Hard as nails—quiet kind of a mug. Wouldn't say much about what he'd done.

LARRABEE [*impressively*]. Matty, I think I've got a chance to land him. Kind of rough on him when he wakes up, but that isn't our affair.

MCGOWAN. Got him hooked, has she? [*Grinning.*]

LARRABEE. He has swallowed the bait, hook and sinker, and if she doesn't land him—well, it'll be the first time she ever failed!

[*Enter* SALLY CAMERON.]

SALLY. Mr. Larrabee, are you aware that you had this dance with *me?*

LARRABEE. Miss Cameron! [*Starting to her.*] My humble apologies. Got to talking football.

SALLY. Oho! Football! Well, I think you'll feel at home when you get into that crowd on the floor, from the looks of that jam. [*They exeunt.*]

[MCGOWAN *walks up to table.*]

MCGOWAN. Say, you! [*It startles* FLORA.] Don't you load these boys up with angel food!

FLORA. Don't you worry! They won't get foundered at a faculty reception. Three gallons of ice cream for one hundred and fifty people.

MCGOWAN. Why didn't you write me this summer—after me sendin' you them ear-rings?

FLORA. Are they real?

[*Feeling of them.*]

MCGOWAN. Real Brazilian. They're all right. I know the man that makes 'em.

FLORA. Ma-mah says I mustn't write to you becuz you used to be a prize-fighter.

MCGOWAN. I've reformed, ain't I? Gone into the football business.

FLORA. You ain't a student.

MCGOWAN. No, I've got to draw the line somewhere. You either pay a little attention to me or else hand back the jewels.

FLORA. How much did they cost?

MCGOWAN. Two hundred dollars!

FLORA. Oh, mercy! [*Amazed.*]

[MCGOWAN *starts* R.—*sees* BUB *sitting against wall.*]

MCGOWAN. What you got over here—a sleeper?

[*Exits* R. FLORA *looks sympathetically.*]

BUB. I wish I was back home.

FLORA. Where is it you live?

BUB. Squantamville.

FLORA. That's an awful wish.

BUB. I ain't havin' no fun here tonight.

FLORA. You'll be all right when you get a dress suit. You ain't in it at Atwater any more unless you've got a dress suit.

BUB. They put on too much style for me.

FLORA. You ought to see some of the parties they give here. Coons to wait on the table. Once they brought their dance music all the way from Columbus.

[TIBBETTS *steps in wearing his good clothes, has a star and carries a cane.*]

TIBBETTS. Miss Wiggins! In case you need me, I'll be right here in the dressin'-room.

FLORA. Last year the Sophomores broke in and stole all the ice cream.

[STUB *and* BESSIE *enter.*]

TIBBETTS. They'll behave themselves this year. [*Glaring at* STUB.] Or my name ain't Daniel Tibbetts!

[*Looks sternly at* STUB. *Exits.*]

STUB. Wonder why that man keeps talkin' to me?

BESSIE [*referring to the flounce torn from skirt*]. I don't believe I have very much skirt left.

STUB. Hope it isn't torn. Don't believe I did it, anyway. I think it was Murphy. It's a crime for a man like that to try to dance!

BESSIE [*who has been holding up one side of her skirt from which the flounces have been loosened. She seats herself at* L. *of* C. *to examine skirt*]. No, it was you — you tried to walk up — But it isn't torn, only ripped. Got two or three pins?

STUB. No, I — [*Clapping hands.*] Here, girl! Will you —

FLORA. I beg your pardon!

STUB [*in a more conciliatory tone*]. Miss Tanner here wants a couple of pins.

FLORA [*gazing at him with supreme scorn*]. Am I your slave?

STUB. Heaven forbid, Cleopatra! But I can't go into the ladies' dressing-room — it would cause a scandal.

[*Two-step music ceases* L. *There is a loud hand-clapping in demand for more music, and it resumes. During the hand-clapping* FLORA, *after standing as if undecided, whisks into the dressing-room.* BUB, *attracted by the noise, crosses to* L., *looking off* L. BESSIE *is still at table, fussing with injured skirt.* STUB *addresses* BUB.]

STUB. Why don't you go in, Mr. Hicks?

BUB. Don't know anybody.

STUB. Get acquainted — jump in. That's the way.

[*Slaps him on the back and pushes him off.* BUB *exits.*]

BESSIE. How about the pins?

STUB. The lady has gone for them.

BESSIE. Stubby Tallmadge, I want to tell you something. I think it's a shame the way Jane Witherspoon is stringing that poor Bolton.

STUB. But when you string me, that's a joke. Why do you girls always hop on to Jane? Is she too popular?

BESSIE. The idea! I like Jane. I'd like to see her marry a rich man and settle down.

STUB. All you girls would like to see her married and settled down — a long way from here.

FLORA [*suddenly stepping out of room at* L.] Safety-pins or regular pins?

BESSIE [*desperately*]. Any old kind!

[*Exit* FLORA L.]

STUB. It's this way, Bessie. We want Bolton to stay here. Don't tell anyone, but if we get a team that looks good, we're going to go through the college and beg, borrow and steal a thousand dollars to cover the check that old man Bolton left in New York.

BESSIE. It's against the rules to bet.

STUB. I know it — that's why you musn't tell any one. [*Enter* FLORA.] They bet at Yale and Harvard. Why shouldn't we be a little sporty?

FLORA. Here's your pins.

BESSIE. Thank you.

FLORA. I'd like to speak to you a moment, Mr. Tallmadge.

STUB. Certainly. Excuse me, Bessie.

[*He stands close to her so as to make interview confidential.*]

FLORA. Ma-ma says —

STUB. Now, Flora, don't introduce sor-

did business topics into this scene of revelry.

FLORA. You promised —

STUB [*diving into his pocket*]. Here! [*Producing coin.*] Here's a half dollar. That makes it seventeen fifty.

FLORA. When do I get the rest?

STUB. I am *not* a fortune-teller, but you'll get it. If I forget to hand it to you — you speak of it.

FLORA. I'll speak of it unless I lose my voice.

STUB. All right now?

BESSIE. What did that girl want of you?

STUB. She wanted me to get a job for her brother.

BESSIE. Why, she hasn't got a brother!

STUB. Then she's been deceiving me.

[*Enter* OMNES.]

MRS. DALZELLE [*outside*]. Phew! I'm burning up! Get me something to drink, Mr. Pearson.

[*She enters, fanning herself, followed by* PEARSON, *mopping his brow.* PEARSON *goes to corner to get her cup of lemonade. Other couples follow closely behind — college boys and town girls, except* LARRABEE, JANE *and* BILLY. MURPHY, BUB *and other new students stand awkwardly on the outskirts or against the wall as wall-flowers. The boys in evening clothes are about table, clamoring for refreshments. As students clamor about table,* TIBBETTS *steps in and raps with his cane on floor. Boys, surprised, turn and look.*]

TIBBETTS. Boys! Be-have! [*Exits* R.]

PEARSON [*looking off after him*]. I shudder to think of what will happen to that man.

FLORA. I can't wait on all of you at once.

OLLIE [*who has managed to get a plate with a little brick of ice cream on it*]. That's a dinky little piece of ice cream.

FLORA. You didn't come here to get a meal, did you?

BESSIE [*to* MRS. DALZELLE]. Where is Jane?

MRS. DALZELLE. I can guess — she's got him in a corner somewhere.

BESSIE. Yes — making him believe that he is the original and only number one. Isn't she a wonder? She collects them and sticks them on cards, the same as Mr. Talbot arranges his butterflies.

MRS. DALZELLE. Nonsense! Jane is a nice girl.

BESSIE. Of course she is — that's what makes her so dangerous. I suppose she'll keep Mr. Bolton hypnotized all evening.

MRS. DALZELLE. You should be thankful. It will give you a chance with the other boys.

BESSIE. That's what some people might call a shot.

[PEARSON *and* BESSIE *exeunt.*]

[JANE *and* BILLY *enter in a very chummy manner, oblivious of others, who look at them curiously as they enter. General hush.* LARRABEE *enters after them, as if trailing. He seems to be a trifle worried on account of* BILLY'S *progress.*]

BILLY. That was the best dance I ever had in all my life — honestly it was.

JANE. It was simply divine. Do you know, you two-step beautifully!

BILLY. I didn't know it — [*Beaming.*] — but I'm glad to hear you say so. I didn't suppose that a Baptist, twice removed, and a Presbyterian on her father's side could ever catch step together.

FLORA. I'll tell you one thing, we ain't got more'n a barrel of this.

BILLY. Perhaps I'd better get you some refreshments before the supply gives out.

JANE. Yes, if you want to get some practice at bucking the line.

[*Assuring himself that* BILLY *is intent on storming the refreshment table,* LARRABEE *addresses her rather secretively and taking himself rather seriously.*]

LARRABEE. Well, what do you think?

JANE. What do I think — I think father's party for new students is a great success — but I also think he should have provided more than three gallons of ice cream and one waitress.

LARRABEE. You know what I mean — Bolton?

JANE. My dear Jack — [*Enjoying his anxiety.*] I haven't mentioned football to him. I can't take a strange young man by the collar and say, "Oh, please, sir, come and play on our team."

LARRABEE. No, but you can lead up to it.

JANE. Can I? I'm not sure that I know how. Perhaps I'd better turn him over to you.

LARRABEE. No, you're the one — only — I — [*Confused.*] — you — are — Confound it all! this puts me in a queer kind of a position — you taking off my badge and wearing his. The Kappa Delt fellows are all crowing about it.

JANE [*flaring up*]. Of all the gratitude — It was your idea — to have Mr. Bolton remain over — for all of us to be nice to him.

LARRABEE. Certainly — certainly! I'm not finding fault. You're doing nobly — only —

[*At a loss for words.*]

JANE. If that isn't just like a man!

[LARRABEE *turns up stage.* BILLY *comes up with a plate containing one small brick of ice cream, a cake or two and a small cup of lemonade.*]

BILLY. Battle royal — but I managed to get this much.

JANE. Thank you ever so much.

STUB. Keep it up, old man. Corker, don't you think?

BILLY [*earnestly*]. Oh, a bully nice girl!

[*On these two speeches* MRS. DALZELLE *has come down and speaks confidentially to* JANE, *from back of table.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. My dear, I think the young man is lost.

JANE [*laughing*]. Won, you mean.

MRS. DALZELLE. It's all the same thing. Make him declare himself to-night.

JANE. Impossible! They never declare themselves until about the third evening.

MRS. DALZELLE. I mean about the team.

JANE. Oh! [*Tapping* MRS. DALZELLE *with her fan.*] Let us hope for the best.

[*Waltz music starts. General exclamation and movement off* L.]

MRS. DALZELLE. Come, Mr. Tallmadge, you are to dance with mother this time.

STUB [*joining her*]. Me for mother!

[*Everyone off except* BILLY, JANE, FLORA, BUB HICKS *and* MURPHY. FLORA *at table,* BILLY *and* JANE *stand at extreme* L. *among plants, looking out toward dancing floor.* MURPHY *and* BUB, *left at* C., *look at each other with a "misery loves company" expression.*]

BUB. Where'd you get your dress suit?

MURPHY. *Borrowed* it.

BUB. I'm goin' to get me one.

MURPHY. My shoes hurt me a good deal. [*Pause.*]

BUB [*taking package from pocket*]. Let's go back here and smoke a cigarette.

MURPHY. Can't — I'm in training.

BUB. Makes me dizzy to smoke, but I s'pose I'll have to learn.

MURPHY. I'd be all right if my shoes didn't hurt me so.

[*Exeunt into men's dressing-room.*]

BILLY. Shall we go in?

JANE. Let's not — it's so bumpy with a crowd on the floor.

BILLY. To tell you the truth, I believe I *would* like it better out here.

[FLORA *watches them with scornful interest.*]

JANE. We haven't bored you by bringing you here to-night?

[*Pushing ice cream aside.*]

BILLY. Bored me! I'm having the time of my life. Funny, too. Everyone said I wouldn't like it in the East.

JANE. *Bless* you! This isn't East. In Boston they call this away out West.

FLORA [L. *of* JANE — *interrupting*]. I beg your pardon, but do you *want* that ice cream?

JANE [*looking at it gingerly*]. I don't believe so.

FLORA. There's others that do — we haven't got any too much.

[*She takes it and puts it on tray with other dishes, which she carries off* L.]

JANE. We must be very economical

here at Atwater — our endowment is small. [*Sits.*]

BILLY. Do you know, I'm falling in love with this part of the country — everything here is older.

JANE [*hitting him playfully with rose*]. I beg your pardon.

BILLY. I mean — the buildings and all that. This is the first college I've seen that had ivy and moss — and traditions — and so on — You know what I mean — you've read these college stories in the magazines.

JANE. A great many colleges in this part of the country make a specialty of moss.

BILLY [*rather laboring to express himself*]. We have big colleges out West, but they all smell of paint and plaster.

JANE. And Standard Oil.

BILLY [*laughing*]. Yes!

JANE. The people you meet here — are they different from the ones you know out West — as you call it?

BILLY. Oh, we have some very nice girls at home — but — but — I don't know — [*Gazing at her confusedly.*] I believe there is a difference.

JANE. I didn't specify girls in particular.

BILLY. Well, that's what I was thinking of. I can say one thing — I — I've never met any other girl who's been as kind to me as you've been.

[*Putting hand on hers. This with sincerity.*]

JANE [*drawing away hands*]. Mr. Bolton, it's awfully good of you to say that — but your father and my father — boyhood friends.

BILLY [WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT *enter*]. What do you say we leave them out of this? [*Starts to move to her, but stops on seeing the doctor and* TALBOT.] Be careful — here's my keeper!

JANE. Mr. Talbot — and father — probably discussing the modern dances.

[WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT, *arm in arm, engrossed in their discussion.*]

WITHERSPOON. I'm called an old fogey, but I maintain that the ballroom dance is an immodest performance.

TALBOT. It does seem to bring the participants into a most immediate juxtaposition, does it not?

WITHERSPOON. If it were not for the accompaniment of music I should say that the young men were embracing the young women.

JANE [*aside to* BILLY]. Isn't father observing?

TALBOT. I see no harm in the rectangular dances.

WITHERSPOON. Which — the square dances? They don't dance them any more.

[*Laugh off* L. WITHERSPOON *moves off to learn its cause.*]

TALBOT. Quite so.

[MURPHY *enters, and finding there is no one behind the refreshment table, goes there, with back to audience, and quickly gulps down several cups of lemonade.* TALBOT *has turned toward him as* WITHERSPOON *goes off. After* MURPHY *has taken three or four cups he is conscious that he is being watched. He looks around and on seeing* TALBOT *he picks up a piece of cake and sits in chair nursing his foot.* TALBOT *watches him until he is seated and then turns and sees* BILLY.]

TALBOT. Ah, Mr. Bolton — I've been endeavoring to learn your whereabouts. May I —

BILLY [*rising and approaching* TALBOT]. Yes, certainly.

[*He is annoyed and apprehensive.*]

TALBOT. There is a train to Bingham at 8:30 to-morrow morning.

[JANE *is looking at* BILLY *intently and apparently waiting for his answer.*]

BILLY. And some later trains, also, I suppose.

TALBOT. The term has already opened.

BILLY. There's no rush. I can get into condition in three days.

TALBOT. I was thinking of your class work.

BILLY. I'll be blamed if I was.

[WITHERSPOON *returns.*]

JANE. I'm surprised, Mr. Talbot! You, an Atwater man, trying to drag Mr. Bolton away to that horrid Bingham.

WITHERSPOON [*reprovingly*]. Mr. Talbot is doing what he considers to be his duty.

[*Music ceases. Sound of clapping of hands and cries of "Encore!" heard off* L.]

JANE [*rising imperiously*]. Father! Come here! I have something to say to you.

[*She goes to him and is whispering to him emphatically during remainder of interview between* BILLY *and* TALBOT.]

TALBOT. Then we shan't take the 8:30 train?

BILLY. No!

TALBOT. What train shall we take?

BILLY. I don't know — we can always get a train — I'm in no hurry. Besides, they tell me Bingham is an awful hole.

TALBOT. Your father informed me —

BILLY. I'm over twenty-one — [*Music starts again.*] — Mr. Talbot, and you're not employed as a governess — you're merely a tutor. Go ahead and tute as much as you please, but don't try to give me orders, because I won't stand for it.

TALBOT [*completely dazed*]. Bless my soul!

[*Backs over to* R. *and bumps into chair. This turns him round and he confronts* MURPHY, *who is still nursing his foot.*]

MURPHY [*quickly*]. It catches right across the instep — seems to bind.

WITHERSPOON. Come, Mr. Talbot, I dare say that at least half a dozen young ladies are waiting for you at this moment on the ballroom floor.

[*Leads him off.*]

[JANE *has gone up into ladies' dressing-room and watches her father take* TALBOT *away.*]

TALBOT [*taking the remark seriously*]. Do you really think so?

[*He and* WITHERSPOON *exeunt.* BILLY *and* JANE *laugh.*]

BILLY. Your father has a streak of fun in him.

[*Comes to her.* MURPHY *rises.*]

JANE. Yes! He isn't all college president.

MURPHY [*stamping his foot*]. Must be about two sizes too small. Oh, me for the foundry!

[*Exits.* BILLY *and* JANE *laugh.*]

BILLY. Did you tell the doctor to take Talbot away?

JANE. I suggested it.

BILLY. Why?

JANE. Well, Mr. Talbot was trying to take you away. I'm afraid I rather forgot myself when I spoke to him so sharply — but —

BILLY. But what?

JANE. I hardly know how to say it.

BILLY [*anxiously*]. You don't want me to go to Bingham? [*She looks up at him and then down, quickly, and shakes her head slowly. He is at a loss for words.*] Well, I don't want to go — either.

JANE [*coming close to him — looking him straight in the eye and making the most deliberate play for him*]. Then why go?

BILLY [*considerably shaken*]. They wanted me on the team there — it was father's idea — I don't care anything about Bingham — I play football because I like the game. I'd just as soon play at Atwater. I'd rather, if I really thought you wanted me to stay.

[*The manliness and sincerity of his tone rather shake her, but she does not retreat.*]

JANE. I — *do* — *want* — *you* — *to* — *stay.*

BILLY [*looking at her seriously and quietly*]. All right, I'll *stay.*

[*Enter* FLORA, MURPHY *and* BUB.]

FLORA [*to crowd off* L.]. I can't be seven places at the same time.

[*She has tray in her hand. She bumps into* MURPHY. MCGOWAN *enters.*]

MCGOWAN. Say *you!*

FLORA. Mr. McGowan, will you please remember *who* and *what* I am?

MCGOWAN. Do you know Mr. Larrabee?

FLORA. I know him when I see him. I've never met him socially.

MCGOWAN. That's his misfortune, not yours. Be a good little girl, now. Run

along and tell him I'm waitin' for him in the gents' dressing-room.

FLORA. I'm no *errand* boy.

[BILLY *and* JANE *have been listening and watching with amused interest.*]

JANE. What is it, Mr. McGowan?

McGOWAN. I want Larrabee to chase out them football players.

JANE. I'll fetch him. [*She starts* L.]

BILLY. No, I'll go.

[*She has already made her exit.*]

McGOWAN [*to* BILLY]. These boys in from the country don't know what a trainin' table is.

BILLY. How does the team shape up?

McGOWAN. They might beat a team from the Colonial Dames, but I have my doubts.

[LARRABEE *on from* L., *talking as he comes.*]

LARRABEE. It's all right, Matty. I'm getting them out as fast as I can.

McGOWAN. Don't let that big Murphy eat any more cake.

LARRABEE. I won't.

[JANE *enters* L., *and stands listening.*]

BILLY. Mr. Larrabee—

LARRABEE. Ah, Mr. Bolton.

[*With forced amiability.*]

BILLY. Need any more men back of the line?

[*Crowd enters.*]

LARRABEE [*with repressed eagerness*]. *Do* we?

BILLY. I'd like to try for half-back.

LARRABEE. *Try! Try! Try!* Do you *mean* it?

BILLY. Certainly.

LARRABEE. By George! [*Grabbing* BILLY'S *hand.*] We're tickled to death to have you.

McGOWAN. Oh, *say*, this sounds too good to be on the level!

[*Music has ceased and crowd is pouring in.*]

LARRABEE. Jane, this is *great!*

[*Shaking hands with her.*]

JANE. Hush now, or you'll spoil everything!

LARRABEE [*to crowd pouring in*]. One moment, everybody—this will *interest* you. [*They stop—others come in to listen.*] Mr. Bolton has a little announcement to make.

JANE [*provoked at* LARRABEE'S *eagerness to give publicity to the news*]. *Don't! Please* don't!

BILLY. Here, here, Larrabee! None of that!

CROWD. Bolton! Bolton! Speech! Speech!

[*Everyone who has been on in this last scene now on, except* WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT. BILLY *standing somewhat apart from others—embarrassed.*]

BILLY [*just as he begins, enter* WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT]. I have no speech to make. All I can say is that—I like it very much here at Atwater, and I've decided to stay and try to make the team.

[*An enthusiastic yell from everybody.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. Mr. Bolton, do you know what I am going to do?

BILLY. Not if I can help it!

[*Turns and runs off, followed by all the girls, who are screaming with laughter. As soon as they are out of sight, all the students surround* LARRABEE *and give the college yell.*]

STUDENTS.

Atwater—Atwater!
Atwater! Rah! Rah! Rah!

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: *A part of the athletic field back of the grand stand, the rear of which is up stage* C. *There is a wide double gateway up stage* C., *supposed to lead to the gridiron and also to the seat sections from which the game is viewed. At* R. *are trees and below them a grass mat. Down stage is a gate supposed to be one of the entrances to the grounds. Up stage is indicated a low building which is quarters for the team. Towards* C. *and up stage from house is a bench. Sweaters and blankets*

may be thrown across bench; also buckets and bottles on ground, a football resting on top of blankets.

The time is Thanksgiving Day afternoon.

At rise of curtain the area in front of team quarters, that is practically all the stage room, is crowded with college enthusiasts — those who are supposed to be on such terms of intimacy with the team and the management that they are admitted to these private quarters back of the grand stand.

In the crowd are STUB, OLLIE, MITCHELL, MCALLISTER, HOPPER *and all the town girls except* JANE. BERTHA TYSON *carries her camera.* BESSIE *wears a striking and rather masculine costume, box coat, fedora hat, etc. Two or three subs or extra players in uniforms and wearing sweaters or wrapped in Indian blankets are in crowd. The students and girls are liberally decorated with ribbons, cherry and white. Some of the men carry walking-sticks with ribbons tied to them. Most of the girls carry small flags, each bearing an "A," cherry on white background.*

At rise of curtain is heard the murmur of the excited group in front of quarters and also the roar of the crowd beyond. The people on stage are frantic with interest, also greatly excited by fact that their team is behind. It is now the short wait between halves and the team is in the building at left getting a rest and rubdown before the final struggle. The tense excitement of a decisive football game should be clearly indicated.

OLLIE. When they had the ball on the fifteen-yard line, why didn't they send it around the end? Did you ever see such chumps?

JOSEPHINE. Oh, they *will* win — don't you think so, Mr. Tallmadge? Say *yes!*

STUB. If they don't, I'll wear this light overcoat all winter.

BESSIE. I never was so worked up in all my life. I wish I could get out there and do something.

STUB. I wish *somebody'd* get out and do something!

ONE OF THE GIRLS. Did you see those big men jump up and down on Mr. Bolton?

BESSIE. Well, what do you *expect* at a football game? Do you s'pose a man's goin' to spread a sofa pillow before he sits down on another one?

[*A loud burst of cheering with nine "Rahs for Bingham!"*]

STUB. Those fellows seem to think the game's over.

[*Enter* LARRABEE, *greatly agitated. He hurries to quarters at* L., *waving aside those who crowd around him with inquiries.*]

LARRABEE. Don't *bother* me!

STUB. He's rattled.

LARRABEE [*shouting into quarters*]. Get them out, Matty — only three minutes left!

MCGOWAN. All right, sir.

HOPPER [*to* LARRABEE]. Don't give up, old man! That touchdown was a fluke.

LARRABEE. Fluke or no fluke, it *counts!* [*Shouting.*] McGowan!

[*Impatiently.*]

MCGOWAN. All right! [*Coming out from quarters.*] Come on, boys.

[MCGOWAN *comes out with basket, sponge, towel, bottle, etc., followed by* PLAYERS *in fighting costumes. There are eleven more men and five of them are very large — one hundred and eighty or two hundred pounds. One of these big men is* MURPHY; BILLY *and* PEARSON *included in the eleven. Suits are soiled and men appear damp and streaky from having been sponged. They look rough, tough and desperate. As they come out the others on the stage crowd around them.* BILLY, *coming out last of all, is somewhat torn up and shows result of repeated assaults on him in*

the first half. As soon as the players have come from their quarters they gather together closely to get instructions from the coach. The spectators crowd in closely.]

LARRABEE. Now, fellows, you *must* brace up. [PLAYERS *listen in dogged silence.*] Just what I was afraid of — you went in over-confident and let them play you to a standstill. [*Frantically.*] Play lower! No chance for Bolton if you don't let him start with the ball. They've got it in for him and you *must* hold them. Hold them. *Hold* them!

[*Almost in a frenzy.*]

STUB. And you, Murphy, if that big fellow gets rough again — wipe up the ground with him.

[*This advice is received with a murmur of applause by the spectators.*]

BESSIE. And that red-headed one — *please* do something to him if you get a chance. [*Greatly excited.*] When you get on top of him — stay there!

LARRABEE [*continuing*]. *Don't* let them work any of those old Princeton tricks on you. Whatever you do, work hard and fast. They've got only six; all we need is a touchdown and a goal.

[*Early in this speech* WITHERSPOON *enters, followed by* TALBOT, *and comes down, interrupting.*]

WITHERSPOON. Mr. Larrabee!

LARRABEE. Yes, Doctor.

WITHERSPOON. Before the second half begins I should like to say a word to the young men.

LARRABEE [*with an ill grace*]. Certainly.

WITHERSPOON [*addressing team*]. It seemed to me that the first half of the contest was marked by unnecessary roughness.

[*Players all grin.*]

STUB [*disgusted*]. Why can't he keep out of this?

MCGOWAN. You know, we ain't playin' drop the handkerchief.

WITHERSPOON [*continuing*]. A proper degree of earnestness is permissible, but extreme violence —

[MRS. DALZELLE *has followed him in — she interrupts.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. Doctor! You are the only one who can tell us. What do they mean by "off-side play"?

WITHERSPOON [*relaxing when he sees her*]. My dear Mrs. Dalzelle — ask me something about Greek or Sanskrit.

[*She takes possession of him and they exeunt together, as* LARRABEE *continues speech to players.*]

LARRABEE. Now, boys, do you understand — no unnecessary roughness this last half.

[*He says this in a perfunctory manner. Players and spectators grin.* JANE *enters.*]

BESSIE. Yes — cripple them, but don't be rough about it!

LARRABEE. Only — remember one thing, we *must* win this game.

MCGOWAN [*looking at watch*]. Time's nearly up.

LARRABEE. Now, then, boys, play if you never played before!

[*General movement toward gate.* STUB, HOPKINS, MITCHELL, MCALLISTER *and other boys encourage players, slapping one and then another on the back. Girls excitedly commend and encourage players. All surging through* C. *to resume play.* BILLY, *moving with others, sees* JANE, *and drops back. Just after players have passed through gate there is a frenzied burst of cheering beyond to signalize appearance on field; also this yell: "A-T-W-A-T-E-R — ATWATER! ATWATER! Rah! Rah! Rah!" Just as this yell is given* BILLY *joins* JANE, *going to her impetuously. She, in deep concern, takes his hand in both of hers, and then remembering herself, drops it.*]

JANE. Be careful! You *must* be careful!

BILLY. How can a man be careful in a football game?

JANE. Time after time I thought you'd *never* come out from under that heap!

BILLY. Just mussed up a little — that's all. Those Birmingham fellows have

. in for me good and hard — but I'll
ow them!

JANE. Oh, Mr. Bolton — Billy — [*For-
etting herself for a moment.*] I want
twater to win — but I don't want you
o — [*Hesitating.*]

BILLY [*taking her hand*]. Don't you
orry about *me*. I've been through
ll this before. I guess you know why
stayed here to play on the team.
Looking at her intently.] And I guess
ou know I'm going to help pull out a
ictory, if I can. It's enough to make
man play to have a girl like you
acking him up.

[LARRABEE, *coming through gate,
breaks in sharply.*]

LARRABEE. Bolton! Get a move on
ou! Time's up!

BILLY. All right, old man.
[*Running up to gate.*]

LARRABEE [*patting* BILLY *on the shoul-
er as he passes*]. A touchdown this
alf!

BILLY. I hope so.
[*Runs through gate.*]

[LARRABEE *comes toward* JANE. *As he
approaches her a sudden burst of
cheering and cries of "Bolton! Bol-
ton!" signalize* BILLY'S *appearance
on the field beyond.*]

LARRABEE. Well, win or lose, it's over
; last!

JANE [*with coldness and restraint*].
Vhat is over?

LARRABEE. This *Bolton* business.

JANE [*severely*]. What do you mean?

LARRABEE. Don't you think I've been
n the sidelines about long enough?
*With a tone of injured innocence and
et rather pleadingly.*] I was willing
o give Bolton the inside track to keep
im here, but I tell you it's been a hard
ull, and now —

JANE [*simmering with indignation,
ut repressing herself*]. And now?

LARRABEE. Well, you were wearing my
adge before he came.

JANE. Mr. Bolton has not asked for
ie return of his badge.

LARRABEE. Jane, don't be unreasonable.
veryone knows why you've been wear-
g it.

JANE [*unable to control herself*]. Do
they? Do they? Oh-ho!

[*Whistle sounds, signalizing the be-
ginning of the second half at back.*
JANE *has started to go when she
hears the whistle, and abouts. She
goes quickly to gates and looks off.*
LARRABEE *comes up to her. She is
almost hysterical with anger.*]

LARRABEE. You don't think I meant to
give you up?

JANE. Everyone knows why I wore it
— set to play a part — am I? Every-
one looking on — amused — and you
come now and say — Oh! Did you
ever pause to think, Mr. Larrabee, that
one who so cruelly deceives Mr. Bolton
may deceive — even you?

LARRABEE. I can't see any occasion for
your flaring up. That first day you
said you'd try to induce him to remain
— and I thought —

JANE. Yes, you *thought!* The college
widow — a joke — the shelf-worn
charmer! Always on the lookout for
a new victim — a smile for everyone.
"How-do-you-do?" a "Good-bye," and
then — another one!

LARRABEE. I never thought that.

JANE. You had a right to think it.
Why, if I had believed all they said,
my heart would have been shattered
every Commencement. Students! What
are they? Feathers, blown by the wind!
Colts playing in the pasture! Kittens
— rolling on the floor! And because
I never took them seriously, I am a
heartless flirt, the *college widow* — the
artful huntress, set forth to capture
football players!

LARRABEE [*helpless*]. Great heavens!
I don't see why you blame me — I've
been crowded to the background for
three months by this new man —

[*Sudden and loud outburst of cheers
interrupt him — cries of "Bolton!
Bolton!"* JANE, *being reminded of
the game, starts suddenly c. as*
FLORA WIGGINS *comes with a tele-
gram in hand. Band off stage play-
ing "Hot Time."*]

FLORA. A telegram for Mr. Bolton.

JANE. Mr. Bolton!

FLORA. Came to the house — everything so upset to-day — we couldn't find him nowhere.

LARRABEE. I'll give it to him after the game.

FLORA. It's from his father.

JANE *and* LARRABEE. His *father?*

FLORA. We thought mebbe it might be important, so we opened it.

LARRABEE. I thought his father was in Europe.

JANE. He was to land this week — wanted to get home for Thanskgiving.

FLORA. He's coming here.

JANE *and* LARRABEE. *Here?*

LARRABEE [*opening telegram*]. I'll read it.

JANE. You mustn't!

[*But nevertheless she crowds up to see what it contains.* FLORA *does the same.*]

LARRABEE [*reading*]. "Have seen the newspapers. You are a hopeless chump. You have allowed that Atwater outfit to bunco you. I don't know the girl's name, but I congratulate you on being the prize idiot of this generation, and the only reason I don't use different language right here is because it's against the rules of the Western Union. I absolutely forbid you to play against Bingham and I'll be on hand to see that you keep out of the game. Hiram Bolton." Great Scott! All that in a telegram!

FLORA [*pointing*]. It's dead-head — marked here in the corner!

JANE. When did it come?

FLORA. Early this morning.

JANE. And he says he's coming.

LARRABEE. He must mean the limited — three o'clock!

JANE. What if he comes?

FLORA. Have you seen Mr. Tallmadge around here?

LARRABEE [*ignoring question*]. He can't go out on the field.

JANE. But if Billy — Mr. Bolton — sees him — or knows he's here — he might go all to pieces!

FLORA. I asked you in a very ladylike manner if you had saw Mr. Tallmadge.

LARRABEE [*emphatically*]. *No!*

FLORA. At least be a gentleman.

[*Sweeps out.*]

LARRABEE. Don't say anything about this wire. I'll leave word at all the gates to have him kept out.

JANE. Tell the boys he *must* be kept out!

[*As* LARRABEE *exits through gate* JANE *starts through gate at* C., *meets* WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT *coming out, both flustered and annoyed by the noise and excitement.*]

JANE [*meeting* TALBOT, *takes him by the arms and leads him down stage*] Where's the ball now?

TALBOT. I believe one of the players has it.

[*She starts in. Her father calls to her.*]

WITHERSPOON. Jane, my dear, I wouldn't look at it. They are becoming more violent every moment!

[*Greatly distressed — hat in hand.*]

TALBOT. I distinctly saw one of the contestants kick his opponent in the abdomen.

JANE. Father, if we lose this game I'll blame you! You compelled those poor boys to attend recitations when they should have been practicing!

[*Outbursts of cheers, accompanied by cries of, "Beat 'em up!"—"That's the stuff!"—"Hit 'em hard!"—"Atwater!"—"Bingham!" At sound of cheering* JANE *hurries off, leaving* WITHERSPOON *bewildered by her attack on him.*]

WITHERSPOON [*shaking his head*]. And Atwater was founded to foster the Presbyterian faith! What would John Calvin say to this?

[*Seats himself on bench —* TALBOT *following him.*]

TALBOT. Doctor — [*Thoughtfully*]. I have been meditating on what you said in the library last evening concerning Professor Werzheimer's theory of unconscious cerebration.

WITHERSPOON [*interested*]. Ah! [*Indicating for* TALBOT *to sit on bench beside him*]. And do you agree with me concerning the corollary functions of the remote ganglia?

TALBOT. Only in part, Doctor. We know that in the medulla oblongata here is a cellular co-ordination between the sensory nervous tissues and that if —

[*On this speech* MRS. DALZELLE *comes* C. *and breezes up to them — interrupting.*]

MRS. DALZELLE. Doctor! Don't give it the slip! Come back and root!

WITHERSPOON. Root? Root?

[*Rising quickly, not understanding.*]

TALBOT. I have heard of Greek roots, but never —

MRS. DALZELLE. Your place is there — cheering them — leading them on to victory — like Henry of Navarre —

[*Whistle. Noise suddenly ceases.*]

WITHERSPOON. Henry of Navarre never had to witness anything of this sort.

MRS. DALZELLE [*referring to silence*]. They've stopped the game!

WITHERSPOON. That silence is ominous. Some one is injured!

TALBOT [*seriously*]. Possibly the police have interfered!

[BESSIE TANNER *enters excitedly.*]

BESSIE. Move back, everybody! We want this bench! He's laid out. They have to carry him!

MRS. DALZELLE. Who — Mr. Bolton?

BESSIE. No — Tommy Pearson! That red-headed imp did it! Oh, if I were a man!

WITHERSPOON. Bless my soul! Thanksgiving Day! A Puritan holiday!

[*Enter* GIRLS. PEARSON, *in battered condition, one leg knocked out, comes assisted on one side by* McGOWAN *and on the other by* STUB. PEARSON *is protesting.*]

PEARSON [*struggling weakly*]. Let go of me! I'm all right! Matty! Let me go back?

McGOWAN. Come off! You can't stand up!

[*Whistle. Cheers and the Atwater yell off stage signalize the resuming of the game with a substitute in* PEARSON'S *place. On this yell* PEARSON *is put on bench. He puts his face into his hands and cries.* BESSIE *exits, shouting.*]

McGOWAN [*to those crowding about*]. It ain't nothing — leg twisted a bit — he'll be all right in a week.

SALLY [*looking at* PEARSON *sympathetically*]. It must hurt him a lot — he's crying!

PEARSON [*stung in his pride — struggling to arise*]. I'm not crying because it hurts! I want to finish the game! [*Makes a start* — McGOWAN *catches him and pulls him back.*] Let go!

McGOWAN. Here! Here! Lay *quiet!*

MRS. DALZELLE [*with motherly interest*]. Did they do it on purpose?

McGOWAN [*explosively*]. Oh, no — them Comanches wouldn't do nothin' on purpose!

PEARSON. It was the third down — seven yards to gain — tackles-back formation. [*Imitating signal.*] "Four — sixteen — twenty-eight!" Into the line — then —

[*Struggling to arise and act out play.*]

TALBOT. There's no meaning in it.

MRS. DALZELLE. Cheer up, Tommy! I'll come and read to you.

[*Atwater yells and cheers.*]

STUB. Poor Tommy!

[*Bursts of cheering and Atwater yell off stage.* BESSIE *reappears and calls frantically.*]

BESSIE. Come on! Hurry up! They fumbled and we got the ball.

[MRS. DALZELLE *and girls exeunt hurriedly with exclamations.* TALBOT *exits* C.]

PEARSON [*cheering up suddenly*]. Hear that, Stub? We've got the ball!

STUB. Don't worry, Tommy! We'll get 'em yet!

[WITHERSPOON *has been standing aside — now he approaches group.*]

WITHERSPOON. What were the real circumstances?

McGOWAN. Rough work, that's what it was! That big truck-horse playin' guard for Bingham runs up to Tommy and hands him the elbow like this — [*Indicating.*] — and falls on top of him, givin' him the twist as they go down!

[*Illustrating on* WITHERSPOON, *twisting his leg in wrestle hold.*]

WITHERSPOON. Desist, I beg of you!

TALBOT [*coming down from gates excitedly*]. Come, Doctor, I am informed reliably that Atwater has the ball!

[*Starting.*]

WITHERSPOON. And you, too, Mr. Talbot!

[*Following* TALBOT. *Off stage singing,* "*Good-bye to You.*"]

MCGOWAN [*with hand on* PEARSON'S *shoulder*]. Come, on Tommy! I'll rub some of that dope on you.

[*Helping him.*]

STUB [*helping on other side*]. That's right, old fox! — and don't feel bad, because the fellow that did this to you will certainly go home on the ice!

PEARSON [*as they are helping him in*]. Knocked out! Carried off! I'll get even with that fellow next year!

[*On this speech they are helping* PEARSON *into quarters at* L.]

[*As* MCGOWAN *and* PEARSON *disappear into quarters and* STUB *starts up stage hurriedly to get back and see the game, he meets* FLORA, *who enters* C.]

FLORA. Mr. Tallmadge, I've been looking for you.

STUB [*dismayed*]. Flora, be reasonable! Not at a football game!

FLORA. Ma-mah says —

[*READY Whistle.*]

STUB. You are becoming insatiable. Haven't I given you money right along?

FLORA. You paid me four dollars and seventy-five cents. You still owe me thirteen dollars and a quarter.

STUB. I know what the amount is. I'm a business man. But you've got no right to dun me to-day. This is a national holiday.

FLORA. I don't know the law, only I think —

STUB. I couldn't pay you to-day if I wanted to.

[*Enter* HICKS.]

HICKS. You're a student here at the college?

STUB [*taken by surprise*]. Yes, I'm a student, figuratively speaking.

HICKS. Do you know my son — his name is Hicks?

STUB. Do you mean Sport Hicks?

HICKS. At home we call him Bub.

STUB [*indicating* FLORA]. She knows him.

FLORA. Indeed I do, and Mr. Hicks is a lovely gentleman! We're engaged!

[*READY Cheers.*]

HICKS. *Engaged!*

STUB. Sure! That always comes in the Freshman year.

FLORA. Don't you remember me, Mr. Hicks — Miss Wiggins?

[*Giving him an affected handshake — rather high up.*]

HICKS [*still dazed*]. How de do?

STUB. Go and tell Sport his father is here.

FLORA. I can do it without you giving orders.

[FLORA *exits.* STUB *is following, but is halted by* HICKS.]

STUB. Say! [*Silence on football field.*] They've stopped the game! I want to find out what's the matter.

HICKS. What's this about Bub? He ain't old enough to marry.

STUB. Don't you worry. Students don't marry. They just fool around.

HICKS. How's he gettin' on?

STUB. Oh, fine! Learning something every day. He knows lots of things now that the faculty can't find out.

HICKS. I judge he must be working hard. He's spent over a hundred dollars for books this term.

[*Loud cheering off stage.* STUB *hurries off to look at game, passing* BUB *coming in.* BUB *wears extravagant college makeup, clothes of extremely sporty cut, an abundance of ribbons on coat. Also a cane with ribbons on; he is in frenzy of excitement and enthusiasm. Rushing upon him, surprises father.*]

BUB. Why, how are you, Governor? Glad to see you! When did you get in?

HICKS [*staring at him as* BUB *shakes his limp hand*]. Why, Bub, I didn't hardly know you!

BUB. How are all the yaps up home?

HICKS [*bewildered and somewhat indignant*]. How are all the *what?*

BUB. Come on! Don't miss the game! The score's six to nothin' against us, but we ain't licked yet. [*Shouts off stage.*] That's the stuff! Give it to 'em! [*Giving the yell all by himself with extreme fervor, and waving stick.*] A-T-W-A-T-E-R! Atwater! Atwater! Rah! Rah! Rah!

[*Rushes through gate, leaving the old man staring blankly in front.*]

HICKS. Well, I'll be damned!

[HICKS *follows* BUB *off as* STUB *comes in hurriedly — dodge each other —* STUB *calling out before he reaches team quarters —*]

STUB. Tommy! Tommy! We've got him! The big fellow that jumped on you — they put him out of business!

PEARSON [*from inside*]. Good work! Where's the ball?

STUB. Don't ask me! That rush line of ours couldn't push a door open!

BOLTON [*outside*]. What's that? I can't get in? I'll show you whether I can't or not — get out of my way!

STUB. Hello, what's the racket?

OLLIE. I tell you you can't come in — I've got strict orders!

[BOLTON *comes through gate.*]

BOLTON. No young whipper-snapper can head off your Uncle Dudley — I'll promise you that!

STUB [*recognizing him*]. Sufferin' skyrockets! Old man Bolton! [*He dashes out, running into* WITHERSPOON *and* TALBOT *coming out.*] Beg pardon!

[*Exits.*]

WITHERSPOON [*preceding* TALBOT, *who shows a slight desire to hurry back and look at the game*]. Come away, Mr. Talbot! I shall not remain to see young men desiccated!

[*This speech attracts attention of* BOLTON, *who approaches* WITHERSPOON.]

BOLTON. Aha! So *there* you are!

WITHERSPOON. Hiram! My dear Hiram!

BOLTON. Don't you Hiram me, you old buncosteerer!

WITHERSPOON. Hiram, you amaze me!

BOLTON. Where's that fool boy of mine?

TALBOT. I can assure you that Dr. Witherspoon had nothing to do —

BOLTON. So *you're* here, are you? I thought I hired you to take him over to Bingham College and teach him everything except botany?

TALBOT. I urged him to go.

BOLTON. Oh, you *did?*

TALBOT. Yes, I did not deem it advisable to use physical force.

BOLTON. Bah! And now you've got him out there playin' *against* Bingham! [*Suddenly remembering.*] What's the score?

WITHERSPOON. What *is* the score, Mr. Talbot?

TALBOT. Six to nothing.

BOLTON [*thinking Atwater is winning*]. What! Six to —

TALBOT. In favor of Bingham.

BOLTON. Hooray! [*Waving his hat.*] Good! And I'll get him out of there before he can change it!

[JANE *flounts in with a glad smile and hand extended, making a supreme bluff.*]

JANE. Mis-ter Bolton! Welcome back to Atwater!

[*Without offering to take her hand,* BOLTON *removes his hat with an extreme flourish and makes a profound and sarcastic bow.*]

BOLTON. Miss Witherspoon, I take off my hat to you. I admire a smooth piece of work — even when I get the worst of it.

JANE [*pretending not to comprehend and adopting the haughty manner*]. Mr. Bolton, I don't understand.

BOLTON. Why, the hackman that drove me up here told me about it — the boys in the street must know it — how you bamboozled him, pulled the wool over his eyes, kept him dangling all Fall — just to play this game.

JANE. Mr. Bolton!

BOLTON. You've made him the laughing stock of your one-horse Presbyterian school!

WITHERSPOON. Hiram, you surely are mistaken. I—

BOLTON. Say, Pete, you wouldn't know if it happened right under your very nose! Now, I'm going out on that field and tackle a half-back harder than he ever was tackled before in all his life! [*Turns up stage and sees determined boys standing in doorway.*] Clear out of that gate! I won't be stopped by any bunch of kids!

[JANE *is desperate and knows that something must be done to save time and avert scene. As* BOLTON *starts toward boys in doorway she speaks to him in a sharp, strained, hysterical voice.*]

JANE. Mr. Bolton!

BOLTON. Well?

[*Pausing for a moment.*]

JANE [*with simulated emotion*]. What you have said — your insinuations — pain me deeply. Oh, Mr. Bolton, you don't believe —

[*Takes one or two faltering steps and faints directly against him, so that he is compelled to catch her in his arms. She hangs limply.*]

BOLTON. Here — I — Miss Witherspoon!

WITHERSPOON. Jane!

TALBOT *and* STUB. She has fainted!

STUB. Here! Put her on the bench!

[*Assisting* BOLTON *to bring her over.*]

BOLTON. Take her, young man, take her! [JANE *sits on bench, supported by* STUB.] Peter, I didn't mean to upset your daughter, but I'm hopping mad!

JANE [*suddenly sitting up*]. Get him away — the cab's outside — keep him away until the game's over!

STUB. Watch me!

WITHERSPOON [*going over toward* BOLTON. *As* STUB *hurries other boys*]. Your sudden appearance and your language —

[*Burst of cheering off stage and shouts of "Bolton! Bolton!"*]

BOLTON. Bolton, eh? I'll soon stop that!

[*Starts* C., *meeting* STUB *and other boys.*]

STUB. Ah, Mr. Bolton, this way.

[STUB *takes him by* R. *arm — another boy by the other arm. Others close in behind. Give him a quick turn and lead him off, he protesting.*]

BOLTON [*as he is led off*]. Here! Let go of me, you young ruffians! What do you mean? Don't you dare to push me!

WITHERSPOON. Young gentlemen! Stop it! Release Mr. Bolton, I say! Young gentlemen! [*Just as* BOLTON *disappears,* JANE *jumps up from bench and waves her college flag triumphantly.*] Jane, what does it mean?

JANE. It means that we still have a chance! Come on!

[*She exits gate at* C., *followed by* WITHERSPOON.]

WITHERSPOON [*as he follows*]. One moment, please. Really, I must demand an explanation of this most extraordinary series of events.

[*Enter* LARRABEE.]

LARRABEE. What's the row?

TALBOT. Mr. Bolton.

LARRABEE. Where is he?

TALBOT. Some of the students escorted him to a cab and drove away — quite rapidly.

[*Enter* PEARSON *from team quarters leaning on crutches. He is in street clothes and wears sweater with "A" on it. He is followed by* MCGOWAN.]

LARRABEE. Good work!

[OLLIE MITCHELL *comes to gates at* C. *There is a roar of cheering off stage.*]

OLLIE. Larabee! Come and brace up those fellows! They're bein' played off their feet! [*He disappears.*]

LARRABEE [*fiercely*]. A lot of quitters!

[*Exits, followed by* TALBOT.]

PEARSON [*leaning on his crutches and calling to* LARRABEE, *who does not turn back*]. Jack! Jack!

[*Starts toward* C.]

MCGOWAN. Here! Come back here!

PEARSON. I want to see the finish.

MCGOWAN. You'll see your finish if you get into that mob!

[*There is a continuous roar of cheering, punctuated by slow, rhythmical calls of "Hold 'em! Hold 'em!"*

LARRABEE *comes in, the picture of despair.*]

LARRABEE. Boys, we're done for!

PEARSON *and* MCGOWAN. What?

LARRABEE. Within two yards of the line and goin' through us like paper!

MCGOWAN. Oh, hell!

PEARSON. Same here!

[*At this point the cries of "Hold 'em!" louder and more frantic. Sudden pandemonium of noise — cheers — howls — horn-tooting, etc.* LARRABEE *throws his hat to the ground.* PEARSON *sinks to bench.* MCGOWAN *waves his hand. The noise subsides a little as* BESSIE TANNER *comes* C., *in dishevelled and wildly excited condition.*]

BESSIE. Jack, Jack Larrabee, come on —come back! Hurrah!

LARRABEE. Are you crazy?

BESSIE. Bolton — got away!

ALL THREE [*starting*]. Bolton!

BESSIE. They had it right up against the line — through — through! [*Gesture to indicate repeated charges and gains.*] Half a minute to play. I was crying — I was crying!

LARRABEE [*shaking her*]. Oh, for heaven's sake!

BESSIE. They started to buck center!

OTHERS. Yes! Yes!

BESSIE. A fumble! Bolton — through like a flash — picked up the ball — down the field!

LARRABEE, MCGOWAN *and* PEARSON. What!

BESSIE. He went through 'em — over 'em — like a streak of lightnin' — right between the posts!

LARRABEE. A touchdown?

BESSIE. Don't you hear that noise? [*She rushes off, followed by* LARRABEE. PEARSON *starts, greatly excited, and is forcibly held by* MCGOWAN.]

PEARSON. Let me go, Matty!

MCGOWAN. Sit down, Tommy, old pal! I'll take a peek. [*He climbs on top of porch on training quarters near gate so that he can look over. The uproar dies down.*] Bolton goin' to kick!

PEARSON. How is he?

MCGOWAN. A little wobbly, but I guess — [*Pause.*] He's walking up.

PEARSON. Wish I hadn't forgotten how to pray!

MCGOWAN. Oh-h-h! False alarm! He's walkin' back again.

PEARSON. Right against the wind, too!

[*A momentary pause — then terrific cheering and Atwater yell.* MCGOWAN *leaps to ground and does a wild dance.* PEARSON *waves crutches.* WITHERSPOON *in from* C., *followed by* TALBOT, *both in a hurry.*]

WITHERSPOON. Come on, Mr. Talbot! Hurry! Stark, staring mad, all of them! [*Exits.*]

TALBOT. I would like to inquire the score, however —

[*Exits as* MRS. DALZELLE *enters.*]

[MRS. DALZELLE *rushes upon* PEARSON, *kissing him. In her excitement she throws her arms around* MCGOWAN *to kiss him. He startled, jumps back and assumes an attitude of defence. All this time the noise outside has been intense and growing as the crowd comes from the field.* BILLY, *carried on shoulders, is brought* C., *surrounded by everybody except* WITHERSPOON, TALBOT, BOLTON *and* STUB. *Flags waving, hats in the air. The crowd has moved off.* JANE *looks off* L., *then sinks to bench for "good cry."*]

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE.—*In front of the Grand Central Hotel, an old-fashioned provincial house of residential patterns with pillars in front. It is evening. The hotel is illuminated and lanterns are hung from trees. The hotel is the headquarters for the celebration following the victory.*

Students at end of porch are singing college songs as curtain rises. The rest of the porch and the windows are filled with town girls, men,

women and children. Everyone has on cherry and white colors. Young men with canes tied with ribbons, young ladies with flags. They applaud the singers. On last song the singers rise and sing as they exit. The people on porch and in windows get into house.

When the students are disappearing HICKS *and* BUB *come out of house.* HICKS *is picking his teeth.*]

HICKS. Well, Bub, that was a mighty good supper!

BUB. That wasn't supper; that was dinner.

HICKS. Dinner at this time o' night?

BUB. Say! Of all the web-footed rubes! If you want to travel with me, you stop eatin' with your knife!

HICKS. Been doin' it for fifty years and never cut myself yit.

BUB. What would Miss Witherspoon think of me if she saw you eatin' with your knife?

HICKS. Witherspoon? I thought it was Wiggins?

BUB. Yes, that was before I joined the Eta Beta Omicrom Omega.

OLLIE [*entering quickly from house*]. Hello, there, Hicks! Have a cigarette?

[HICKS *hesitates and looks around at* BUB.]

HICKS [*taking cigarette*]. I don't want to get too reckless! A feller in there — [*Indicating hotel*] — that said he was a professor of astronomy give me what he said was a "sympathetic" temperance drink and kind o' got my head to buzzin'.

BUB [*lighting match and lighting* HICK'S *cigarette for him*]. You follow me, Guv'ner, and we'll give you a touch of high life!

OLLIE. If you're looking for excitement, come along. The boys are getting together on the campus.

HICKS. I'm finding out more about colleges than I ever knew before.

[*Exits, followed by* BUB. *When* BUB *is at entrance, enter* FLORA.]

FLORA. Mr. Hicks!

[*He stops, annoyed.*]

BUB [*going back near her*]. Well, what is it?

FLORA. You're trying to keep *away* from me — you seem to forget that we are engaged.

BUB [*pulling out his cuffs and pulling his legs apart, in an attempt to be the cocky and self-possessed man of the world*]. I forgot to tell you about that — it's off.

FLORA. Off! [*Stunned.*] After me introducin' you into society, an' pressin' your trousers for you —

BUB. I'll tell you, Flora, you're all right in your way, but for a college man whose father is a State Senator —

FLORA. That talk about father would be a good deal stronger with me if I hadn't *seen* him a couple of times. So you spurn my love, do you?

BUB [*complacently*]. I don't want to be cruel, but — all is over. [*Exits.*]

FLORA. Well, if that ain't a shame! This makes five or six times that I've had students treat me this way and I'm just about gettin' discouraged!

[*Enter* BESSIE, SALLY, LUELLA, RUTH *and* BERTHA.]

BESSIE. Oh, Flora!

FLORA. Miss Wiggins, if you please.

BESSIE. Miss Wiggins, then. Where are all the students?

FLORA. Don't speak to me about students! [*Crosses to* L., *then stops and turns.*] Miss Tanner!

BESSIE. Yes?

FLORA. We have been good friends — I want to give you some advice — I know what I'm talking about, for I'm a woman that has suffered.

BESSIE. Gracious me!

FLORA [*impressively*]. Don't never have nothin' to do with no students!

[*Exits.* BESSIE *to her as she exits.*]

BESSIE. I'm sorry, Flora, but your warning came too late.

MRS. DALZELLE [*entering quickly from hotel*]. Children, come in and look at the table. They have the football right in the centre with cut flowers all around it.

[*Girls start into hotel as* WITHERSPOON *enters.*]

WITHERSPOON. Mrs. Dalzelle! Mrs. Dalzelle!

MRS. DALZELLE. Yes, Doctor!

[*As she comes down steps to meet him, girls exit.*]

WITHERSPOON. You have some influence with the young men — I haven't. They are tearing down fences, pulling off gates — it's dreadful!

MRS. DALZELLE. My dear Doctor, youth must have its fling. Perhaps you and I have said a last good-bye to the heyday of life, but think — the boys —

[*Shouting off* R.]

WITHERSPOON. Exactly! The boys! I shall retire!

[WITHERSPOON *hurries into hotel. Students and girls come from hotel, attracted by the shouting. The girls wave handkerchiefs to the approaching students, who come in on a lock-step formation chanting, "Hicks! Hicks! Hicks! Hicks!" The team has picked up* HICKS *and are taking him around with them as a lark. He has his hat on one side of his head and has ribbons tied on his coat and is quite hilarious. One carries a wooden gate, another a sign, "Undertaker"; another a sign, "Fancy Groceries"; another a small store box, etc.* HICKS *stops at* L. *of* C. *and this halts the line. Many of the boys go up to meet the girls in doorway, tipping hats and cheering. Others* — MURPHY, BUB, MCALLISTER, HOPPER, MITCHELL — *surround* HICKS.]

HICKS. Come on, boys, let's sing something. I know a college song.

OLLIE. All right! Cut loose! We'll help you out.

HICKS. I guess you know it.

[*Starts to sing.*]

"My bonnie lies over the ocean,
My bonnie lies over the sea.
My bonnie lies over the ocean —
Oh, bring back —"

[*Growing disorder, shouts, hoots and cat-calls finally drowning his voice. He stops.*]

MURPHY. I don't want to hear any more of *that!*

MCALLISTER. Hicks, you're a bird!

HICKS [*flattered*]. Boys, do you know, I'm mighty glad Bub got in with such a nice crowd down here.

BUB. I told you they were all right.

[*Enter* LARRABEE.]

MCALLISTER. Hello, there, Jack! [*Shakes hands with him, a faint cheer for* LARRABEE *as he crosses to meet* MCALLISTER. *It must be made evident that he is not the hero of the moment. He tips his hat mechanically, but shows no gratification.*] What's the matter?

LARRABEE. Matter? I work all Fall to build up a team and they go out and play a rank game!

OLLIE. What do you care as long as we win?

LARRABEE. Bolton did it — he'll get the glory.

OLLIE [*comprehending*]. O-o-oh!

LARRABEE. I'd give eight dollars to get out of making a speech to that gang to-night — the way I feel — Come in and let's look over the feed.

[LARRABEE *and* OLLIE *go into hotel.*]

BESSIE. I wish I could be a college man.

SALLIE. Oh, I don't know. I could never learn to smoke a pipe!

BESSIE. Oh, but to stay out every night — and sing songs — and break windows — gee! I wish I could be one of them!

MRS. DALZELLE. Don't worry about it, Bessie. You didn't miss it very far.

BESSIE. Why, you mean old thing!

SALLIE [*drawlingly*]. I'd like to know what became of Mr. Bolton?

MRS. DALZELLE. He has gone to get his laurel wreath from Jane. Isn't it all a huge joke?

LUELLA. I think it's an outrage — a cruel, cruel outrage!

MRS. DALZELLE. Look out! Here she is! [JANE *and* TALBOT *enter.*] Jane, we were just speaking of you.

JANE. Indeed?

MRS. DALZELLE. It was really you who saved the day.

JANE [*trying to cheer up*]. I'm sure I don't feel as if I deserved any credit.

SALLIE. Where's Mr. Bolton?

JANE. I haven't seen him since the game.

BESSIE. Come on, girls! They've started a bonfire! It's more fun to have a war dance around a bonfire!

[*All girls except* MRS. DALZELLE *and* JANE *start to leave.*]

BERTHA [*stops*]. Oh, girls, we can't have a war dance without a chaperone! [*Turning to* MRS. DALZELLE.] Come on, Mrs. Dalzelle. [*Takes her hand and drags her off with others.*] Come on, Jane!

JANE. No. For some reason I don't feel like doing a war dance.

[*Students heard singing.* TALBOT, *who has been crowded to background, timidly approaches* JANE.]

TALBOT. Miss Witherspoon!

JANE. Oh, Mr. Talbot, I forgot you were here!

TALBOT. Young ladies often seem to forget *my* presence. [*Pause.*] Miss Witherspoon, for a long time I have purposed speaking to you concerning a matter which is of the deepest moment to me.

JANE [*dismayed*]. Oh, my — another one!

TALBOT. I have hesitated — feeling that I occupied such a lowly position in this world of scholarship, that I had no right to submit my claims. But now a great honor has come to me.

JANE. Really? I'm delighted to hear it.

TALBOT [*beamingly*]. I have been elected an honorary member of the Ohio State Anthropological Society.

JANE [*dubiously*]. How very nice!

TALBOT [*disappointed at her lack of enthusiasm*]. Next year I shall have a chair in the faculty.

JANE. Mr. Talbot, I esteem you very highly and always shall, but —

[BESSIE *enters.*]

BESSIE. Jane, here comes Tommy Pearson — his leg wasn't broken at all — only dislocated, or some little thing like that.

[PEARSON, *on crutches, and* MCGOWAN *enter, followed and surrounded by* MRS. DALZELLE *and all the girls, who are sympathetic and interested.*]

MCGOWAN. All right, ladies, all right! Don't upset him!

JANE. Mr. Pearson, we are proud of you.

PEARSON. Oh, I didn't do much. Say, what became of Billy's father?

JANE. The boys took him for a nice long ride.

LUELLA. We're going to put sofa pillows around him and get him a nice cup of tea.

MCGOWAN [*aside, disgusted*]. A cup o' tea!

MRS. DALZELLE. Tommy Pearson, I could just hug you!

[*Throws her arms around him.*]

MCGOWAN [*alarmed*]. Nix, nix, lady! None o' that!

MRS. DALZELLE. Why?

MCGOWAN. Don't jump onto a cripple. [*To* PEARSON.] Better get inside and keep quiet, Tommy.

PEARSON [*as he starts, surrounded by sympathetic girls*]. All right, Matty.

[*As they go in* TALBOT *seats himself and takes out large envelope with imposing sheet of heavy paper with red seal — the formal notice of his honorary membership — he looks at this as they are going in and after they are in he lowers it and shakes his head sadly.*]

TALBOT. I have made a great mistake — I should have gone in for football. [*Laughter and* BOLTON'S *voice is heard. "That's a good one!"* TALBOT *is alarmed.*] Dear me! The elder Mr. Bolton!

[*Arises and hurries into hotel as* BOLTON *enters laughing, followed by* STUB.]

BOLTON. That's one of the best I ever heard — new one, too! Where did you get it?

STUB. Traveling man told it to me. Now here's the hotel, Mr. Bolton. I've brought you back, safe and sound, and no hard feelings, I hope?

BOLTON [*looking at him grimly*]. Say, you're wastin' your time goin' to college.

A young man with your gall ought to be in business — out West.

STUB. Give me a job?

BOLTON. Any time you want it.

STUB. Only one thing holdin' me.

BOLTON. Girl?

STUB. You're a great guesser. She's the golf champion of this state — eighteen holes in eighty-one.

BOLTON [*grimly*]. That'll help a lot when you get to keepin' house! [*Wild shouting and sounds of break-up heard off.*] Ah, more innocent fun!

STUB. This is the night they break training — and some furniture.

BOLTON. What is that they're pilin' on the fire?

STUB. Sign-boards.

[TIBBETTS *enters, walking feebly on cane. Appears same as in Acts I and II, except that mustache is grey, and face is aged and careworn.* BOLTON *sees him and calls to him.*]

BOLTON. Officer! [TIBBETTS *stops and looks at him meekly.*] You're just in time. See what they're doin'?

TIBBETTS [*brokenly*]. Mister, did you ever try to be a policeman in a college town? Three months ago I was a happy man. They gave me this job because I was in the regular army and won a medal for fightin' Injuns. Now, I ain't afraid of Injuns, but when it comes to students — Look at me! I ain't had a wink of sleep in two weeks.

BOLTON. Why don't you resign?

TIBBETTS. I want to, but they can't get anyone else to take the job.

[*On this speech* OLLIE MITCHELL *comes in with a long barber pole — "Tonsorial Parlor" painted on the base.*]

OLLIE. Here, Tibbetts! Get hold and help carry this!

[*Swings it roughly around to him.*]

TIBBETTS [*catching it*]. Yes, sir.

[*He and* OLLIE *exit.*]

BILLY [*rushing in quickly*]. Father! BOLTON [*turning and looking at him fixedly and not offering to shake hands*]. It is a pleasant evening, isn't it?

[STUB *rushes to* BILLY.]

STUB. Billy, I didn't get to see it, but they tell me it was great stuff!

[*Hits* BILLY *on the back.*]

BILLY. Look here, Stub. I've just heard about the whole business with father, and I won't stand for it! [*With determination.*] Do you understand?

STUB [*crushed*]. Sorry you feel that way, Billy, but we didn't want him to butt in and kill our last chance.

BOLTON. So you've been worried about me, have you? That's one of the best things I've heard lately. I suppose you were thinking about me all the time I've been away?

STUB. Look here, Billy! We didn't mean —

BOLTON. You go in and collect your bets. I'll do the talkin'.

[BOLTON *goes up stage, giving* STUB *a chance to get a quick aside to* BILLY.]

STUB. It's all a bluff! He says you're the greatest half-back in the business! Good night, Mr. Bolton.

BOLTON. Good night, young man.

[STUB *exits into hotel.*]

BILLY. Well, say it!

BOLTON. I can't. This is a nice college you've got here. They put me in a taxi and drove me all over creation — singin' college songs and tellin' stories. [BILLY *has to smile.*] It's a joke, I s'pose? Then I'll tell you something that ain't a joke — they've made a fool of you here!

BILLY [*startled and angry*]. Who — what do you mean?

BOLTON. Don't you s'pose I know why you threw down the old man and stayed over at this Jim Crow Presbyterian high school? You're a hell of a Baptist! I guessed it before I came — I found out all about it before I was here five minutes. Everybody's on to it except you! That's the way, when a woman's makin' a fool of a man!

BILLY. If you're referring to Miss Witherspoon, we'll simply drop the subject.

BOLTON. No, we won't! You were a good thing from the tall grass and they took you in. And it must have been

an easy job, because she's been at it for years.

BILLY. Look here, Father! You be a little careful what you say about her.

BOLTON. Why, they call her "the college widow"!

BILLY. They have no right to — she's a very young woman.

BOLTON. They start young in college towns.

BILLY. How do you know?

BOLTON. I wasn't always fifty-five. Don't talk back to me — I know what I'm talkin' about. I'm going to ketch a night train for the west. When she cuts the string and you hit the ground, you can pick up the pieces and follow me. That'll be soon, because she's simply kept you here to play this game to-day. [BILLY *is standing silent with closed lips. A pause.*] How long was that run you made?

BILLY [*still looking straight ahead*]. About a hundred and five yards.

BOLTON. How'd you get past the fullback?

BILLY. He dove for my knees and I hurdled him. [*Pause.*] I didn't know till after the game that you'd bet on Bingham.

BOLTON. I don't care for the money. I've lost a thousand dollars every minute since Steel Common started to slump, but I don't like to see you, Billy, made a laughing stock of by a lot of pin-heads!

BILLY. Are you going west to-night?

BOLTON. I'm going to take the first train out of this town, no matter which way it goes!

BILLY. If what you say is so, I'll be close behind you.

BOLTON. Who's got a time-table?

BILLY. I'll get one.

BOLTON. Hold on! Try the hotel.

BILLY. I'm keeping away from that crowd in there.

[*He exits as* WITHERSPOON *comes from hotel.*]

WITHERSPOON. Hiram! May I — dare I, offer my humble apologies for this indignity?

BOLTON [*holding out his hand and smiling grimly*]. Pete, I wouldn't give two cents for a boy that wouldn't put up a fight.

WITHERSPOON. This mania for athletics is a veritable cyclone — I am carried along with it, helpless but protesting.

[OLLIE MITCHELL *enters.*]

OLLIE. Hey, fellows! Here's Prexy.

WITHERSPOON. Dear me! Let us go into the hotel.

OLLIE. Dr. Witherspoon, don't go! The boys want a little speech.

[*All come pouring back with shouts of "Prexy!" He is led up to a place on steps, terrified and flustered.* BOLTON *skirts the crowd and escapes into hotel. As* WITHERSPOON *appears on steps the boys join in chorus to tune of "Johnny Harvard."*]

"Oh, here's to good old Prexy!
Fill him up a full glass!
Fill him up a glass to his name and fame
And at the same time don't forget his daughter!
Fill her up a bumper to the brim!"

[*Students step out and bow to* JANE. *This ends with a shout and* WITHERSPOON *begins with speech.*]

WITHERSPOON. Ladies and young gentlemen of Atwater College. It is natural for us to rejoice over the signal victory that we have won to-day. [*Cheers.*] Athletic sports and the interest attendant thereon are not to be decried so long as they do not distract the attention of the student body from the regular college course. [*Cheers.*] I trust that in your celebration you will conduct yourselves with due restraint and propriety.

[*Cheering and applause.*]

[OLLIE MITCHELL *tears away the swinging sign, "Grand Central Hotel" and carries it off. Protest by* WITHERSPOON.]

MCALLISTER. Let's have a speech from old man Bolton!

[*Shouts* "BOLTON! BOLTON!"]

WITHERSPOON [*protesting*]. Young gentlemen!

HOPPER. He ducked into the hotel.

MCALLISTER. Come on! Let's get him out!

[MCALLISTER *leads the way and all go in.* OLLIE *is last of boys to cross. He is followed by* FLORA, *who calls to him.*]

FLORA. Mr. Mitchell!

OLLIE. Oh, how are you, Flora?

FLORA. I'm looking for Mr. Tallmadge.

OLLIE. He oughtn't to be around here.

FLORA. It's strange! It's strange that I can't find him.

[*Voice of* STUB *heard outside.*]

STUB. All right, Charlie! Much obliged! [*Comes to* C. *of stage with money in hand, half talking to himself as he comes out.*] I just got forty-five of that good Bingham money.

FLORA. Mr. Tallmadge!

OLLIE. She's got you this time!

STUB. How are you, Flora? Looking fine this evening.

FLORA. Ma-mah says—

STUB. I know what she says, and this time I fool you. I have here in my left hand some easy money, and if you will name the trifling amount that I—

FLORA. It's thirteen dollars and twenty-five cents.

STUB. I don't bother with small change—here's fifteen! [*Gives her money.*] You just keep the one seventy-five and buy yourself a nice sable wrap, a gasoline runabout and a rope of pearls!

FLORA [*taking money and drawing herself up proudly*]. Mr. Tallmadge, although mah-mah and I take boarders, we are ladies! [*Whimpering.*]

STUB. Certainly. No argument about that.

FLORA. My father was Chief of the Fire Department before he died.

STUB. Oh, *before* he died?

FLORA. We ask charity of no one, do you understand? I once thought you was a gentleman. [*She sweeps off.*]

OLLIE. Gee! You've insulted her!

STUB. Yes, but she kept the one seventy-five!

[BESSIE *comes out from hotel excitedly.*]

BESSIE. Stubby! Stubby! You're a cute little kidnapper!

STUB. Duck! Duck!

[OLLIE *hurries in.*]

BESSIE. If I were a married woman like Mrs. Dalzelle, I'd hug you!

STUB. You can be if you say the word! [*Waving money.*] For the first time in my life, I've got enough money to buy a license.

BESSIE. I never knew it before, but I believe it's your tin-type that goes on my dressing-table.

STUB. Does it? Then give me a guarantee. I can't take it away from you. You're too strong for me. But I'm dead willing to be overpowered!

[*He is about to kiss her when* BILLY *returns with time-table in hand.*]

BILL. Stub, I want to see you.

BESSIE. Mr. Bolton, we've been looking everywhere for you. Mrs. Dalzelle in particular.

BILLY. Great heavens! Keep her away, will you? And give father this time-table.

STUB. He's back in room thirty-two. I planted him there to keep him away from the gang.

BESSIE. I'll take it to him. You'll not run away?

BILLY. I'll be in presently.

BESSIE [*at* STUB, *who still has money in his hand*]. Here, give me that! I know you. I'll take care of it for you. [STUB *hands it to her. She goes in and looks back.*] I'll have to begin some time and it may as well be now.

[*Exits.*]

STUB. Debts all paid and money in the bank!

BILLY. Stub. I want you to tell me something. Here, give me your hand. [STUB *holds out hand and* BILLY *gives him the "grip."*] Now, then, was there a put-up job to land me on this team?

STUB. Do you want the truth?

BILLY. That's what I do.

STUB. Well, the first day you landed here we "sicked" the widow on to you. We knew that she was the only one who could hold you here, and she said she'd do it if she could.

BILLY. She's been stringing me along just to keep me here for the game?

STUB. I wouldn't put it that way. Of course we *all* tried to make it pleasant for you.

BILLY. Now, don't rub it in. Will you do something for me? Larrabee's in the hotel. Ask him to come out here.

STUB. Billy, don't start any scrap!

BILLY. I can't scrap — haven't got on my suit. I just wanted to tell him what a nice fellow he is.

STUB [*starting up toward hotel and then stopping and speaking*]. Billy, it was a low-down trick at the start, but we're for you now — honestly we are!

BILLY [*calmly*]. All right, Stub.

[STUB *hurries in as* MCGOWAN *comes out. They meet at steps and square off at each other. Singing in hotel ceases.*]

MCGOWAN. Hello, there, Billy! All the Dolly Grays looking for you.

BILLY. Stop! I don't want to see them.

MCGOWAN. Don't blame you. This college is the grandest hero factory I ever see. There's Pearson — gets his leg twisted and every girl in town wants to hold his hand. [FLORA *enters.*]

FLORA. Mr. McGowan.

MCGOWAN [*turning and going toward her*]. Hello, there, Flossie.

[*Lifts hat.*]

FLORA. You told me once to beware of students. Oh, Mr. McGowan, you wuz right, you wuz right!

MCGOWAN. The surest thing in the world. They're nothin' but a bunch of triflers.

FLORA. Will you take me home? I'm afraid to go by myself.

MCGOWAN. You'd better be, with all that jewelry on you.

[*Giving her his arm.* LARRABEE *enters from hotel.*]

FLORA [*as they exit*]. I've been thinking of you all day.

BILLY. Larrabee!

LARRABEE. Well?

BILLY. I know what I ought to do. I ought to give you at least one good punch!

LARRABEE. And while you were doing that, what would I be doing?

BILLY. I — I beg your pardon, old man — that's not the way to talk. I don't suppose I have any right to blame you — or anyone else — but myself. I'm all upset.

[JANE *comes out hurriedly and, seeing the two men face to face, supposes it is a quarrel. She is standing on steps.*]

JANE. Gentlemen! You mustn't — I — I saw you come out, Mr. Larrabee. I was afraid —

BILLY [*with his hat off, looking first at one and then at the other*]. I'll be going. [*Starts to go.*]

LARRABEE [*also with his hat in his hand*]. No, I'll be going. You're a great half-back, Bolton! You're a good fellow, too — but a little slow in finding out some things. I congratulate you. [*Reaches for* BILLY'S *hand and shakes it.*] Good night, Miss Witherspoon. [*He exits into hotel, leaving* BILLY *mystified. Pause.*]

JANE. Have you seen your father?

BILLY. Yes, I saw him.

JANE. Do you believe it?

BILLY. I won't believe it until I hear it from you.

JANE. It's — it's true.

BILLY. And all that you've said to me — all that you've led me to believe — simply part of the —

JANE [*looking down, ashamed*]. Yes.

BILLY [*decisively*]. No, I don't believe it. [JANE *is startled.*] Jane, we might as well have an understanding — I don't care what you thought of me at first — it's what you think of me now.

JANE. I didn't suppose you'd ever speak to me again.

BILLY. Oh, pshaw! A man always plays harder after he's thrown down and walked on a few times. You know I didn't make a touchdown to-day until the last minute of the play.

JANE. If you'll just forgive me, that's all I'll ask.

BILLY. That won't help a bit. Look here! I'm going back home. I couldn't stay here after what's happened. Be-

ides, I'm no good at college — played our years of football. I'm ready for something else. How about you?

JANE. I don't know what you mean.

BILLY. Yes, you do. You've had forty fellows try and tell you this same thing, and because you never said "Yes" to any of them, that's why I want you. I'm twenty-two years old and you are —

JANE [*forgetting herself*]. Do you know?

BILLY. You're *about* that.

[BOLTON'S *voice heard in hotel.*]

JANE. There's your father.

[BOLTON *and* STUB *come out.* STUB *is carrying* BOLTON'S *traveling bag.*]

STUB [*following* BOLTON]. That's no joke about the job — I've been called before the faculty.

BOLTON. I hope they fire you. Bright boy like you is wastin' time studyin' botany. [*Start to go off* L.]

JANE: Oh, Mr. Bolton!

BOLTON [*turns, sees her, takes off his hat*]. Again I take off my hat to you. Billy, you've just got time to pack and catch that night train.

BILLY. I'll do it!

JANE [*to* STUB]. You take Mr. Bolton's dress-suit case back into the hotel. He's going to stay over for the football supper.

STUB. Do you mean it?

BOLTON. What?

JANE. Oh, you might as well — you're paying for it.

BOLTON. Well, of all the female nerve!

STUB [*crossing over to* BILLY *and putting out his hand*]. Put it there, Billy! [*They give the "grip."*]

BILLY. What do you mean?

STUB. Oh, wake up! Get into the play!

[BOLTON *kisses* JANE.]

BILLY [*astonished*]. Father!

BOLTON. No wonder you've been a freshman for four years! Come on, young man! [*To* STUB.] I'm going to give 'em all the laugh!

[*Exits into hotel, followed by* STUB. BILLY *runs up to hotel, as if to follow, when* JANE *speaks.*]

JANE. Mr. Bolton! [BILLY *stops and turns.*] What was it you were going to say, when we were interrupted?

BILLY. I'm going out West to help run the railroad. Will you come with me? [*Puts out both hands.*]

JANE [*looking around to him, then turning away again, smiling*]. Well, your father and my father were boyhood friends — [BILLY *is about to embrace her when the crowd in hotel are heard shouting: "Bolton! Bolton!" and singing of "Boola." Preventing him from embracing her*]. They are calling you!

[BILLY *rushes up to hotel, followed by her. He turns and embraces her and kisses her.*]

CURTAIN.

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Other plays dealing with college life:

The Fair Coed (George Ade)
The Poor Nut (W. C. and Elliott Nugent)

QUESTIONS ON "THE COLLEGE WIDOW"

1. Point out instances of exaggeration used for comic effect.

2. Are the characters individuals or types?

3. Is the play faithful to the atmosphere of college life?

4. In what ways is the play old-fashioned?

5. Cite instances of satirical treatment of certain features of college life.

6. Does the play come closer to farce or high comedy?

RACHEL CROTHERS

Rachel Crothers has achieved success in three difficult fields — acting, writing, and producing. She was born in 1878 in Bloomington, Illinois, where both her parents were practicing physicians. Before graduating from the Normal School in her home town, she had tried her hand at play writing and had joined an amateur dramatic society. A compromise with her scholastic training finally led her to accept a position as teacher of elocution in the Normal School; but the lure of the stage proved irresistible and she joined that best of all histrionic training schools — a stock company. Like Pinero, Miss Crothers has undergone a valuable stage training as a preparation for her career of playwright and producer. After a tour of the country in the highly emotional success, *The Christian,* she joined a school of acting, where she had the satisfaction of helping produce some of her own plays. During the war she was president of the Stage Women's War Relief Organization.

Miss Crothers now lives in New York, where she personally stages and directs all of her own plays. She acts but seldom, although her interpretation of the mother in *He and She* in 1920 received unqualified praise from the New York critics. Such stage stars as Mary Mannering, Chauncey Olcott, Maxine Elliott, Ben Lyon, Katherine Cornell, the Taliaferro sisters, and Viola Allen have appeared in Miss Crothers' productions. Her plays are all aimed directly at stage presentation; her eye is on the contemporary audience; she knows precisely how to utilize legitimate stage business, how to balance nicely her use of sentiment, humor, and irony: she is a master of dramatic economy. Although from a literary and artistic point of view her plays may be occasionally vulnerable, there is no question in regard to the dramatic effectiveness of the play scene by scene.

All Miss Crothers' plays are problem plays and consequently must suffer the fate of all problem plays: when the question involved declines in contemporary interest, the play will naturally lose in interest. Plays that have lived deal with problems of eternal significance; they are plays dealing with character. *He and She,* for example, was received by its 1920 audience as an attempt to prove that happiness in marriage is impossible when a wife is devoted to a career. Changing economic conditions and social customs are already dating the play. *A Man's World* (1910) points out the unjust treatment of women in "a man's world" but already many of the discriminations against woman have disappeared. *Mary The Third* (1923), which, like *Craig's Wife* and Ibsen's social dramas, cries for honesty in family life, seems destined for a longer life than the earlier plays. *Nice People* (1921), although already several years old, still deals with a problem undiminished in interest since the composition of the play. The problem of the younger generation, of the very definite reaction against parental authority that took place after the war, the stubborn demand of youth that it examine critically ready-made theories, moral codes, and social customs before it accept or reject them, the general substitution of excitement and pleasure for the older ideals of happiness, the letting down of barriers of conduct resulting, not in moral disintegration necessarily, but in a general coarsening inevitably — all facets of the problem are revealed in *Nice People.*

Expressing Willie (1923), Miss Crothers' favorite among her plays, combines with a very lively satire an extremely human story. There is a marked improvement in characterization over *Nice People,* and the dialogue is no less satisfactory. Although Mrs. Smith, Minnie, and Willie are drawn with both photographic ac-

curacy and imagination, the house party guests, who serve as victims of a good-natured raillery, occasionally cross the borderland into caricature. In *Expressing Willie* Miss Crothers makes merry with a widespread shallow philosophy of our day — see the advertising pages of any one of the numerous "success" magazines — and turns the satire on all those humorless people who, without a sense of proportion or rational ballast, attach themselves to current intellectual and emotional fads. Canny Mrs. Smith with sheer common sense sees through the surfaces and self-deceptions, detecting the close relationship between new self-expression and old selfishness.

Miss Crothers' plays are distinguished by excellent dialogue. Clayton Hamilton asserts that "the most satisfying dialogue being written for the American stage to-day is that of Rachel Crothers." It is witty, but not artificial like the repartee of *A Woman Of No Importance;* it achieves verisimilitude yet escapes dullness, for the author is an artist in selecting, omitting, condensing. Miss Crothers' plays are joint literary and social documents of the age, and are evidence as well that the author has a sure instinct of the theatre. The characters are for the most part authentic as the dialogue; however, if an occasional character smacks of the stage rather than life, it must be remembered that Miss Crothers has been a student of one as long as of the other.

EXPRESSING WILLIE
(1923)

BY

RACHEL CROTHERS

CHARACTERS

MINNIE WHITCOMB
WILLIE SMITH
MRS. SMITH
TALIAFERRO
GEORGE CADWALADER
DOLLY CADWALADER
FRANCES SYLVESTER
SIMPSON
REYNOLDS
JEAN

ACT I: The living room in the home of Willie Smith.

ACT II: Scene 1 — Same as Act I.
Scene 2 — Willie's bedroom.

ACT III: Same as Act I.

TIME — The present.

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EXPRESSING WILLIE

ACT I

TIME.—*The present. A Saturday afternoon in spring.*

PLACE.—*The ridiculously magnificent house of Willie Smith on Long Island.*

The room is the most pronounced type of the overdone Italian in America. Its lofty spaces and emptiness leave it cold and formal. The few fine old pieces of furniture and tapestry emphasize the space rather than fill it.

Two steps at the back leading up into the hall make an impressive entrance into the room.

As the curtain rises — two women are standing in the center of the room rather clinging together and looking lost and grotesquely out of place.

One is a small spare woman with an extremely sharp and intelligent face. She is about sixty-five and a shrewd practical strength and dominance make her a striking little figure in spite of her plainness, which the very good and dignified, though somewhat passée black gown does not conceal but rather accentuates.

The other woman, who is holding on to the older one and looking rapturously about the room, is tall and thin and utterly drab in personality. Her clothes look as though she had been traveling and are generally limp and nondescript in effect. The hat is a little askew and has a faint suggestion of an attempt to be becoming and artistic with its rather wide brim and pale rose. Her face has a persistent sweetness and appeal. She looks wonderingly and admiringly at others, not expecting to be looked at or admired herself.

MINNIE [*in awe-struck tones*]. It's marvelous — perfectly marvelous! I feel as if I were standing in an old palace or something. It's unreal. I know I'll wake up and find I'm back home. I've dreamed what it would be like but I never dreamed anything as magnificent as this. It's marvelous!

MRS. SMITH. It cost an awful lot of money, Minnie. The most expensive architect in the country built it and the most costly interior decorator decorated it and he's bought everything there is to be bought in Europe and America. They call this the living room — but nobody lives in it. Willie's in the city all day and I stay up in my own room with a little of my old furniture I saved when he began getting rid of things — and the servants rattle around down here eating their heads off. He's got twenty now — all told — inside and out.

MINNIE. Twenty what?

MRS. SMITH. Twenty servants.

MINNIE. Oh my! It's like a book, isn't it? I just can't believe it! How proud and happy you must be, Mrs. Smith! Oh, how proud and happy!

MRS. SMITH. Shucks! I'm a lonely old woman, Minnie, and Willie's a lonely man.

MINNIE. How could he be? He's a prince among men now. Every paper you read — every magazine you pick up has his picture in it and an article about his phenomenal fortune and the phenomenal way he made it.

MRS. SMITH. Well, this is what it's bought him — an empty house.

MINNIE. I should think it would be full all the time of interesting important people.

MRS. SMITH. It would be easy enough

to fill it up. [*She stops a moment — listening.*] You out there in the hall, Simpson?

SIMPSON [*a very perfect footman appearing in the entrance*]. Yes, Madam!

MRS. SMITH. You needn't hang around. Go see they get this young lady's trunk put in the right room.

SIMPSON. Very good, Madam.

[*He retires with dignity.*]

MRS. SMITH [*whispering*]. They listen so you can't breathe but they hear it. I'm having you right next to mine so you won't be scared. What was I talking about? Oh, yes, it would be easy enough to fill it up, but Willie don't want anything but the best — and the best ain't easy to get.

MINNIE. I don't see how it could be hard for *him now.* Oh, that *chair!* It looks as if kings have sat in it. And there's one of those things I've never seen before. [*Looking at the priedieu.*] He's a great man *now.*

MRS. SMITH. He's a *rich* man. You see he hasn't married anybody yet.

MINNIE. That seems so strange.

MRS. SMITH. He came nearer to marrying you than he ever has anybody since.

MINNIE. Oh, don't let's talk about that, Mrs. Smith. That's all over and gone — long, long ago. If it weren't I couldn't have come. Your letter was so sweet and made me feel so comfortable. I was awfully proud to come of course. The whole town's excited about it. They've always said you both were completely weaned away from everybody — and then when your letter did come, it was just —

[*Her voice breaks slightly.*]

MRS. SMITH. You're a good woman, Minnie. You certainly deserve a little rest and change from drudgery. I've been a long time doing this — a long time inviting you — but I had to wait 'til he suggested it himself.

MINNIE. Oh, *did* he? Of course I know he lives in another world now — entirely. What a beautiful piano! Who plays on it?

MRS. SMITH. Nobody. Minnie, I'm worried about Willie.

MINNIE. Oh my! Why? His health?

MRS. SMITH. No — worse'n that. He's bitten with a new thing entirely.

MINNIE. Oh dear! What?

MRS. SMITH. He's too smart for just the ordinary thing that's chasin' after rich people — but this is an *idea*—rather than just the people themselves, and it's the first time I've ever been scared about his common sense. Willie's as smart — as shrewd as they make 'em in business. He's been up against the biggest of 'em — but something's got in under his skin now that I'm afraid of.

MINNIE. What? What *is* it?

MRS. SMITH. All kinds of women have chased him, but up to now *I've* always been the most important woman in his life. I've always been able to steer him without letting him know it.

MINNIE. Is it a woman?

MRS. SMITH. No — it's an idea — but there's a woman mixed up in it and she *might* get him through that. She *might,* and it's the only thing on earth that could take him away from me unless I want him to be taken.

[*A sudden vehemence and jealousy showing itself.*]

MINNIE. What *is* the idea?

MRS. SMITH. It's making him think there's something *great* shut up inside of him which has never been found out. It's making him think he's a great man *all by himself*—without his money.

MINNIE. But he *is* — isn't he?

MRS. SMITH. Willie's about as great as my foot. Who made him? *I* did. Who began it all back there in Tuckerville? *I* did. Who nagged him and prodded him and pushed him and *beat* it into him that there *was* a fortune in the toothpaste if it was only put before the public right? Me — *me* — and I don't propose to let a woman who's as foreign to us as the north pole come along and turn his head and get the money and then throw him away like a sucked orange.

MINNIE. But *would* she? Maybe she loves him.

MRS. SMITH. Shucks!

MINNIE. Maybe he loves her.

Mrs. Smith. Willie ain't the loving kind. The usual thing in a woman don't get him at all. If it was just that I wouldn't turn a hair. How old are you now, Minnie? Thirty, ain't you?

Minnie. Yes. Yes I am. It's really thirty-one.

Mrs. Smith. Well — you look it — but there's no disgrace in that. Willie came nearer lovin' you than he ever did anybody.

Minnie. Oh, Mrs. Smith!

Mrs. Smith. If you hadn't been quite so fond of him, I expect you would have got him. Lord, Minnie, I haven't seen a woman blush like that since I left Tuckerville. You see he hasn't forgotten or he wouldn't have invited you.

Minnie. Isn't it wonderful that he hasn't?

Mrs. Smith. Don't be so meek and humble. That always was your trouble. Now you run along upstairs and put on the best thing you've got and I'll send for you when Willie comes. He'll want to show you the rest of the house himself, and tell you what everything is and where it came from. That's about all there is to it — the telling about it. See — [*Pointing through a window.*] the house sticks way out on that side and way out on the other. You could put an army in it. Mind these slippy floors. I tell Willie the only thing this room is fit for is a skating rink. Simpson! [*Raising her voice.*] He'll take you up, and don't be too long. [Simpson *appears from the left and* Reynolds, *a footman, from the inner door at center.*] Jimmie — well — one of you take this young lady up to her room.

Simpson. Very good, Madam.

[*He silently directs* Reynolds *to lead the way and steps back for* Minnie *to pass.* Reynolds *exits at left.*]

Mrs. Smith. And Minnie, if you don't find everything you want you just ring one of those bells and somebody will come and get it for you — no matter what it is.

Minnie [*as she stands on the top step and looks back into the room*]. Oh my! It *is* a fairy tale. It makes me wish I were a wonderful person for the first time in my life. It makes me want to speak out something — that has never been said. Something beautiful and great. [*She makes a broad vague gesture into the room and stands staring wistfully. A motor horn is faintly heard.*] Oh — is that a bugle?

Mrs. Smith. It's *Willie*. He always blows three times so I'll know it's him. Go on. Scuttle up the stairs. I don't want him to see you yet.

[*She motions* Minnie *out frantically.* Simpson *follows* Minnie *off.*]

[Mrs. Smith *listens a moment, then turns back into the room — waiting with a nervousness which even her grit doesn't quite control.*]

Mrs. Smith [*after a moment — calling sharply*]. Willie!

Willie [*from the hall*]. Hello!

Mrs. Smith. Here. I'm in here.

Willie [*appearing in the doorway*]. Well — Snooks, what are you doing down here?

Mrs. Smith. Oh, I'm just lookin' round to see if everything's all right before you — before anybody gets here. I've been all over the house to see that there's soap enough.

Willie [*laughing at her affectionately*]. Nobody here yet?

Mrs. Smith. No — not yet.

Willie [*as* Simpson *comes to take his coat and hat*]. Oh, Simpson,— are there flowers in all the rooms?

Simpson. Yes, sir.

Willie. Send the Rolls to the four-fifteen. One gentleman will come by that. The others will be motoring down. Have the other garage opened up and put Raymond in charge.

Simpson. Very good, sir.

Willie. And have my car put up and the Mercedes brought round. I may want it.

Simpson. Yes, sir. [*He goes.*]

Willie [*coming down into the room*]. I thought I'd get out earlier but I got caught in a jam at the office.

[Willie *is thirty-five — a fairly good-looking typical American — radiating health and energy — thoroughly conscious of his success and power.*

There is still a very wholesome commonplaceness about him which his millions and his strikingly correct clothes cannot hide. He beams at his mother with honest devotion.]

WILLIE. Well, Mother—I like to see you down here.

MRS. SMITH. Where you going to put her?

WILLIE. Who?

MRS. SMITH. *The* woman—Mrs. Sylvester.

WILLIE. At the end of the south corridor—overlooking the sunken garden. She'll appreciate that effect more than any of them. And Mr. and Mrs. Cadwalader in a suite in the north wing and Taliaferro over on my side.

MRS. SMITH. There isn't any danger of any of 'em staying longer than Monday morning, is there?

WILLIE [*chuckling*]. No. Why?

MRS. SMITH. I'm going to stay up in my room. I'm not coming down at all.

WILLIE. Of course you are. What do you mean?

MRS. SMITH. I've changed my mind.

WILLIE. You can't do it. That's ridiculous—and I want them to see you. Anybody who knows me knows I've got a great mother.

MRS. SMITH. So long as you know it and I know—it don't matter a fig whether anybody else does or not.

WILLIE [*laughing at her with pride and affection*]. You're not a very modest little violet, are you?

MRS. SMITH. Modesty never got anybody anywhere till after you're *there*. Then modesty's a great virtue.

WILLIE. But I want you to *see* these people.

MRS. SMITH. I've seen all kinds come and go. They'll soon blow over.

WILLIE. That's where you're wrong. I've struck my gait at last. I like them better than any I've ever known in my life.

MRS. SMITH. Oh—you do?

WILLIE. Yes, I do. They satisfy me. They're free and broad and *real*.

MRS. SMITH. They know your money's real too.

WILLIE. Rot, Mother. These people don't care anything about my money.

MRS. SMITH. Oh, they don't?

WILLIE. Not a hang. They've gone way beyond money.

MRS. SMITH. Oh, they have?

WILLIE. They're not the ordinary aristocrat. They're idealists—with *vision*.

MRS. SMITH. When you say *they* I s'pose you mean *her*.

WILLIE. N-o—not exactly. Though I do think Mrs. Sylvester has opened up more for me—made me see more than anyone else *ever* has.

MRS. SMITH. Oh. What's she made you see?

WILLIE. That absolute freedom—the *expression of oneself*—is the most important and developing thing in the world.

MRS. SMITH. Well, I'll put you to the test and see how developed you are. Minnie's here.

WILLIE. What Minnie?

MRS. SMITH. What Minnie? Minnie Whitcomb that you grew up with and almost married and got tired of and dropped like an old shoe. *Your* Minnie.

WILLIE. Here? Where?

MRS. SMITH. Right here in this house. She's come to your week-end party.

WILLIE. Good Heavens, Mother, she can't.

MRS. SMITH. *Can't?* She's here. She's come.

WILLIE. How'd she get here? This is *awful*.

MRS. SMITH. Now, Willie—are you a big man or a little one? We've owed this to Minnie a long time and I just made up my mind not to put it off any longer. I invited her.

WILLIE. What in—

MRS. SMITH. And I told her *you* did too. I said *"we"* in the letter or I knew she wouldn't come.

WILLIE. *What did you do it for?*

MRS. SMITH. Minnie's always been on my conscience and she *ought* to be on yours.

WILLIE. Well, she's *not*. Why *now?* Why *this* time of all others?

MRS. SMITH. I didn't want her to

come and find us in a perfectly empty house. It's just *the* time.

WILLIE. It's just the time to ruin the whole business. This party means an awful lot to me, Mother. It will change my whole— Where is she?

MRS. SMITH. Upstairs.

WILLIE. What does she look like?

MRS. SMITH. Just the same as she used to.

WILLIE. That'll be nice. Why didn't you— There's something darned queer about this. Why didn't you tell me you were going to do it?

MRS. SMITH. Because I knew you'd act just exactly the way you *are* actin'.

WILLIE. I'm stumped. I don't know *what* to do.

MRS. SMITH. Do? You're goin' to make her welcome. Minnie's a good girl.

WILLIE. I bet she is. Lord, Mother, when you get set on a thing you *are* a mule.

MRS. SMITH. I'd rather be a mule than a fool any day. Come on—let's get it over with. *Simpson!*

WILLIE. Don't, Mother! Don't yell like that. Ring—*ring.*

[*Pulling the bell rope himself.*]

MRS. SMITH. My voice is better than any bell in the house. I can sit still and use it. God knows I've helped you to get everything *you* wanted, Willie—with everything in me. Now this is something *I* want and I— [SIMPSON *appears.*] Tell the young lady to come down.

SIMPSON. She's just here on the stairs now, Madam.

MRS. SMITH. Oh—well—you go away then.

[SIMPSON *disappears. They wait, watching the entrance. After a moment* MINNIE *comes into it. She is wearing a dress of some thin blue material. It is provincial and tame, but it emphasizes her pale sweetness and there is something in her long thinness which is half awkward and half beautiful—a grace which has never asserted itself, because of her extreme shyness and self-depreciation. She stands on the top step now—looking at* WILLIE *with frightened appealing eyes.*]

MRS. SMITH. Well, Minnie, here's Willie. He's just been saying how glad he is to see you.

WILLIE [*after a slight pause*]. How are you, Minnie?

[*He moves towards her with his hand out. She goes down the steps and slips just as she gets to him—throwing out her arms and grasping him to save herself.*]

MRS. SMITH. There, I told you so! That's not her fault. [WILLIE *disengages himself.*] Sit down, Minnie. Put her in a chair, Willie.

MINNIE. Oh no. I'm all right now. It was clumsy of me to do that. I can shake hands now.

[*Putting out her hand again.*]

WILLIE [*taking her hand uncomfortably*]. How are you, Minnie? How are you? I hope you're well.

MINNIE. Oh, yes, thank you, I'm well. Are you well? You look *wonderful.*

WILLIE. Thanks. Did you—have a—good trip—*on?*

MINNIE. Oh, yes, I—

MRS. SMITH. No, she didn't. It was hot and cindery.

WILLIE. Yes, I suppose it is very hot in the middle West this time of year.

MRS. SMITH. It always has been and it always will be. Minnie likes the house.

MINNIE. Oh, it's beautiful. And you were so good to invite me to come and see it.

WILLIE [*after a quick look at his mother*]. It's supposed to be one of the best examples of its period.

MRS. SMITH. I haven't told her about your party yet.

WILLIE. Oh—well—a—. [MINNIE *looks questioningly from one to the other.*] I have some people coming for the week-end—a—over Sunday you know. They'll be arriving soon.

MINNIE. I'm sure you know wonderful people now, Willie.

WILLIE. *I* like them but I think you might have enjoyed yourself more some

other time. What I mean to say *is*— these people will seem very strange to you.

MINNIE. I'd like that. The stranger the better. I've seen so little that *is* strange.

MRS. SMITH. Of course. Why travel if everything's just like it is at home?

WILLIE. But what I mean to say is— I'm going to be very frank with you, don't let them see that you're surprised at anything. Just agree and drift along —easy.

MRS. SMITH. Why should she agree when she *don't?*

WILLIE. I'm trying to *explain,* Mother. They speak a different language. They've *had* everything and *done* everything and they're going on after something *further*—that is, after something further than life as it's ordinarily understood. They're after the *overtones*— so to speak.

MRS. SMITH. The what?

MINNIE. Oh, I know. It's a musical term.

WILLIE. That makes me think. Don't say anything about giving music lessons. They wouldn't understand that.

MINNIE. Oh.

WILLIE. Music—in the abstract— yes—that's a good thing to talk about. You can say you're *fond* of music.

MRS. SMITH. But don't tell 'em you've been smart enough to take care of yourself and your good-for-nothing father most of your life by giving piano lessons. Don't tell 'em anything as bad as *that.*

WILLIE. Now, Mother—

MINNIE. I know what he means. It takes the music out of music when you think of teaching it. I know. I won't.

WILLIE. And by the way—I'll call you Miss Whitcomb, of course.

MINNIE. And shall I call you Mr. Smith?

MRS. SMITH. Rubbish!

WILLIE. And don't wait to be introduced. It isn't done much. I've been in places where they don't introduce people at all. Sometimes I go right up to a person and say "My name's Smith" —See? And that's enough. It's stiff to—

REYNOLDS [*coming from the outer entrance at* C.]. I beg pardon, sir. A motor is drawing up. I think the—

MRS. SMITH. I'm going. You stay here, Minnie.

[REYNOLDS *goes out C.*]

MINNIE. Oh, no, I'll go with you.

MRS. SMITH. No, no—no you don't. You keep her there, Willie.

WILLIE. Keep still. Wait, Mother. Don't be running out like that. You—

[MRS. SMITH *scrambles up the steps and out.*]

MINNIE [*panic stricken*]. Where shall I go?

WILLIE [*suddenly nervous and trying not to be*]. Don't go any place. Keep still. Sit down. [MINNIE *starts carefully to a chair, almost sitting.*] No, don't. Don't do *anything!*

[MINNIE *takes long careful steps and gets to the other side of the piano, standing uncomfortably by it.* WILLIE *goes to the steps and waits.*]

TALIAFERRO [*coming into the entrance after* REYNOLDS *has entered and stood aside for him*]. Well—here I am.

WILLIE [*trying to be equal to this important moment*]. Oh, hello, Taliaferro—hello. How are you? Glad to see you.

[TALIAFERRO *is about forty, tall, slender, and over elaborate in his grace and flamboyant distinction. His great surety of his own importance and his very nonchalant indifference towards others is amusing and charming rather than disagreeable—since under the pose and the ego are a very quick sympathy and a warmth of keen appreciation.*]

TALIAFERRO [*staying on the steps and looking about—ignoring* WILLIE'S *hand*]. It makes a very noble impression. The approach is good. I'd heard it was bad—but it's really very good. About as well done as it can be in America. I congratulate you, Smith. If one *must* live in a new house, it's very good. How are you? [*He comes down and shakes hands with* WILLIE *but still looks about the room.*] Oh, yes—oh,

yes. Burton always builds a house — but he builds for *himself* — not for the people who are going to live in it. How do you feel in it? How do *you* feel? [Willie *is getting ready to answer.*] You don't feel at all of course. You're just making motions — and you never will, my dear man, you never will. Only you'll never know it, so what does it matter? Only it does matter. Those are just the things that *do* matter. Oh God, *how* they matter! [Minnie *is getting ready for anything that may be expected of her, but no one looks at her.*] I can't paint you in this house, Smith — if that's what you want. I shall have to take you out of it. Of course, if you want a photograph — with this background — *yes* — go to anybody — anybody — but if you want *yourself* painted — if you want *me* I shall take you out of this.

Willie [*trying to be nonchalant*]. What would you suggest?

Taliaferro. I sha'n't have to do any suggesting. It will come to me — out of you — so strongly that — Oh — [Minnie *comes from behind the piano and moves toward them as bravely as possible.*] Oh, no — I see. [*Putting a glass in his eye.*] Something quite different. I thought for a moment I could paint this lady in this room.

Willie. Do you know Miss Whitcomb? She's staying in the house.

Taliaferro. Should I? Are you anything in particular?

[Minnie *is about to speak.*]

Willie. Miss Whitcomb is a musician. Will you come up to your room, now?

Taliaferro. Oh, no. I'm not one of those guests who stay in the bath most of the time. I'll chat with my fellow artist if you don't mind.

Willie. Well — I —

Taliaferro. Oh, you *do* mind?

Willie. Certainly *not*. I'll jump into something comfortable. I've just got out myself. Won't be a minute. This is the great Taliaferro, Miss Whitcomb. You mustn't mind what he says. He tells the truth to us all.

[Willie *runs up the steps and off R. with as much swank as possible.*]

Taliaferro. That's why they call me eccentric. There's nothing so strange as the truth. A — I keep thinking you're beautiful and then I see that you aren't. That's a pity. You should have been. [*He comes closer to* Minnie, *staring at her through his glass much to her painful embarrassment.*] Oh, I'm not talking about your nose. What have you done or not done that has kept you from being beautiful?

Minnie. Oh nothing could have made me beautiful.

Taliaferro. *Ah* — fear. That's what it is — *fear*. I get that. What are you afraid of? Don't you feel your own greatness?

Minnie. Oh, I'm not a great person.

Taliaferro. Ah, my dear lady, the most commonplace of us have greatness in us but we don't know how to use it. The great truth of life is shut up in us tight and we go on like apes — imitating each other — instead of giving out — *out* the something which is in each one of us quite different from in any other. The naked truth of *any* soul is important. Tell me — have you killed something which should have lived? Oh I don't mean details. I'm not interested in facts. Have you stifled something which might have been a real contribution to life?

Minnie. I've never even dared to think of it like that.

Taliaferro. But you *do* think it.

Minnie [*with a sudden passionate appeal*]. But is it *true?* Have we all something to give which matters whether we give it or not?

Taliaferro [*responding instantly with tenderness and understanding*]. We have *ourselves* — that inner self which is trying to break through. Have you never listened? Have you never let it speak to you? Have you never let it tell you your own power?

Minnie. Do you mean what you're saying? I mean — do you *really mean it?*

Taliaferro [*becoming bombastic again*]. There you are! We're so used to empty words that do nothing but *hide* us. Why should I speak to you at

all if not to try to reach the *real* person in you. You don't show me what you are for fear I'll think it worthless. *I'm* the modest person. I give you all I am — out — open — naked.

MINNIE. It must be wonderful to feel that way.

TALIAFERRO. It is indeed. Why don't *you?* Why don't you let go?

MINNIE. I don't know how. I didn't know I ought to.

TALIAFERRO. You haven't tried.

MINNIE. But how can I? How can I try without being ridiculous?

TALIAFERRO. Why not be ridiculous and be alive? You've shut yourself in with fear. Is that all there is to you?

MINNIE. There might have been something else. Is it my fault that there isn't?

TALIAFERRO. Oh the *might-have-beens!* How we like to blame them.

MINNIE. *Could* there have been great love and great music in me — or have I only imagined it?

TALIAFERRO. Imagination, dear lady, is creation. You haven't used your imagination strongly enough. Great love and great music are magnificent ambitions. You're either seeing yourself too large or too small. Free yourself — *free* yourself and find out the truth. If you've *let* things overpower you — for instance if you've let this commonplace man command you to come and play for him —

MINNIE. What commonplace man?

TALIAFERRO. Smith.

MINNIE. Oh — *he* isn't commonplace.

TALIAFERRO. You see! — You've let his belongings overshadow you. You've let —

DOLLY [*coming into the entrance*]. Hello, Tollie.

[DOLLY *is extremely smart and alert and sure of herself, but her conceit is very good-natured and comfortable for others. She is followed down the steps by* GEORGE CADWALADER, *her husband.* GEORGE *is not so sure but he's large and pleasant and altogether a very desirable person to have about.*]

TALIAFERRO. Hello, Dolly. Hello, George.

[*Leaving* MINNIE *and going up to shake hands with the others.*]

GEORGE. Hello. How are you?

DOLLY [*looking about*]. My God, it *is* big, isn't it?

TALIAFERRO. Yes, it would be.

DOLLY. It's a scream. It makes me feel like a peanut.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. Good idea if something *could* make you feel a little smaller.

DOLLY. Where is he? Where is our royal host?

TALIAFERRO. I believe he's jumping into something comfortable.

DOLLY. Oh, *is* he? I don't see anything comfortable here to jump into. Awful! [*Sitting in the large chair.*] Is Frances here?

TALIAFERRO. I haven't seen her.

DOLLY. She'll make an entrance, of course. I wouldn't miss seeing Frances come down those steps for the first time for anything on earth. Doesn't the house look as if he had built it for her? How she will drape herself around it. Are you going to paint him?

TALIAFERRO. I'm n-o-t sure. I haven't found the real man yet.

DOLLY. That's easy. He's a dear sweet disgustingly rich thing who doesn't know what to do with himself. When I think how divinely delightful George would be with this money, it makes me positively ill.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. — Do you think we're expected?

TALIAFERRO [*laughing as he stretches comfortably on a seat*]. I'm sure I don't know whether you are or not.

DOLLY. Of course we are.

GEORGE. I think we got the wrong date.

DOLLY. Of course we haven't. George is bored stiff because I made him come. It's a splendid chance for him to make an impression. There's no telling what Mr. Smith might do if he really knew George.

TALIAFERRO. No — there's no telling.

GEORGE [*discovering* MINNIE]. Shut

up, Dolly. You're not the only person in the room, you know.

MINNIE [*smiling bravely and coming forward*]. My name is Minnie.

DOLLY [*looking at her and laughing*]. Oh, is it really? How do you do?

MINNIE. I mean Whitcomb. Minnie isn't my name at all. I don't know why I said that.

TALIAFERRO. No, it couldn't be. Minnie's much too mincing for you. I seem to see you on a *large* scale somehow. Minerva — possibly yes.

MINNIE. Oh that is my real name.

TALIAFERRO. Ah yes — I got that.

DOLLY. I notice you get most things after you've been told, old dear.

TALIAFERRO. Well, that's more than most people do at that.

DOLLY [*laughing again*]. That's so all right — my friend. Do you see yourself on a large scale?

[*Smiling impertinently at* MINNIE.]

MINNIE [*not quite sure whether she's being laughed at or treated with very kind attention*]. Oh, dear, no. Oh no, no.

TALIAFERRO. She doesn't see herself *at all.* She doesn't know anything about herself.

MINNIE. I only know I'm not what I'd like to be.

DOLLY. And what would you like to be?

MINNIE. I'd like to be — Oh, I don't think I could tell you.

WILLIE [*rushing in and down the steps*]. So sorry. I didn't know you were here. [*He gives a sharp questioning look at* MINNIE *which sends her back into shyness again.*] How are you, Cadwalader? Awfully glad to see you. How are you, Mrs. Cadwalader?

[*He shakes hands with great dash.*]

DOLLY. I'm mad about the house. It looks *just* like you. I could have told it was yours with my eyes shut.

WILLIE. Think so? I'm glad to hear you say that. I've tried to keep it simple and homelike.

DOLLY. Yes, it's about as homelike as the Metropolitan Museum. Come, come, don't be swanky. You know you're bursting with pride and I'm so envious I simply can't bear it. Life's too dreadful. George is so magnificently clever and nobody knows it. Speak up, Georgie, and tell this great man how clever you are.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. It's hot — don't you think?

DOLLY. George thinks it's hot. Do you think it's hot? Yes, we all think it's hot. Well — that's *that.*

WILLIE [*with great pride in his guests*]. It certainly is great to see you here.

[TALIAFERRO *is talking to* MINNIE *and* GEORGE *has gone over to them.*]

DOLLY. We brought our riding breeches. I hear you have the best stables on Long Island.

WILLIE. Oh — I can give you a fair mount. When will you ride?

[*They go to look at the view from the window at L.*]

DOLLY. Early to-morrow morning if I can get George up.

GEORGE [*to* TALIAFERRO]. What do you think of the house?

[*Speaking over* MINNIE'S *head as she sits on a bench.*]

TALIAFERRO. Oh, the *house* is all right.

GEORGE. What's wrong, then?

TALIAFERRO. It needs somebody in it who has some faint idea of what it's all about.

GEORGE. Wait till Frances gets in it.

TALIAFERRO. You think she's really going in for him, do you?

GEORGE. Of course. Why not? She couldn't let this go, you know.

MINNIE. Is that the lady who's coming?

GEORGE. Oh, yes — she's coming.

TALIAFERRO. If she ever gets here. I want my tea. I presume that's waiting for her, too.

MINNIE. I suppose she's a very wonderful person.

TALIAFERRO. Oh, yes, she is.

GEORGE. Oh, yes, she is.

[*Both men laugh.*]

MINNIE. You're *all* so wonderful.

GEORGE [*forgetting* MINNIE]. Any golf around — think?

MINNIE. I say I think you're *all* so wonderful.

TALIAFERRO. Oh, there's sure to be.

[*Not listening to* MINNIE.]

GEORGE. I'd like to go over to Piping Rock to-morrow if there isn't anything nearer.

MINNIE. I say you're —

TALIAFERRO. He probably has eighteen holes right here on his own place. He wouldn't miss that.

GEORGE. Will you tell me anything he hasn't got?

TALIAFERRO. Everything but a yacht I believe. I'm told he isn't a good sailor.

MINNIE [*turning from one to the other*]. No, he never did like the water.

GEORGE. And it hasn't occurred to him yet to have one for other people.

MINNIE. I say he never did —

TALIAFERRO. I beg your pardon! Were you saying something to me?

[*Bending over her elaborately.*]

MINNIE. I say he never did like the water. But I'm sure if he knew his friends wanted a yacht he'd have one. [*Both men laugh.*] He is so *very, very* generous and thoughtful for other —

TALIAFERRO. There she is.

[*They all turn.* FRANCES SYLVESTER *is in the entrance.*]

FRANCES. Oh, how marvelous! I can't come down yet. I must stop and drink it in.

DOLLY. This is a purple moment!

[MRS. SYLVESTER *is tall and extremely slender — both of which are exaggerated by the very clinging and sweeping effect of her clothes. She is frankly made up — her good points embellished and her bad ones made assets. She is outrée — fascinating, exotic, unnatural, and courageous enough to get her effect.*]

TALIAFERRO. Don't move. It's delightful. We said you'd do it.

FRANCES. Oh you dear people! *Do* I look well here?

DOLLY. Not quite so well as you *think* you do, darling — but very well indeed.

GEORGE. You're stunning, Frances. Never saw you look better. Come on in — the water's fine.

FRANCES. Do come and take my hand from here, Mr. Smith. You haven't said a word to me.

WILLIE [*going up to take her hand*]. I can't think of anything good enough to say.

FRANCES [*still holding his hand as she comes down the steps*]. How sweet you are! Don't laugh at me. But I don't want to *speak*. I don't want to say a word. I just want to *feel* it. There is *nothing* that so moves me as wonderful old houses. They're full of the past. They speak to me.

GEORGE. This is a brand new one. There aren't any spooks here.

FRANCES [*putting her hand on* WILLIE'S *arm*]. There! You see how much feeling it has. I quite forgot it wasn't old. It quite moved me. This room does something to me. I can't tell you just what —

[*She stops at the center posing effectively.*]

MINNIE [*moving forward impulsively*]. It did to me, too. I know what you mean.

FRANCES. Oh — what have I been saying? I thought we were alone.

WILLIE. Don't you know Miss Whitcomb?

FRANCES. You know I don't, you wretch, and you've let me go on so. I hope you're a very frank person yourself, Miss Whitcomb. What did the room do to you?

MINNIE. It made me feel as though something more than just people ought to be here. It made me feel that unseen things ought to be seen here.

WILLIE [*as* SIMPSON *and* REYNOLDS *appear*]. Here's the tea. Will you serve it, Mrs. Cadwalader, please?

[*They forget* MINNIE *and turn their attention to the very magnificent tea.*]

DOLLY [*going to the tea table*]. I suppose you ask me because you think I'm older than Frances. I'm *not!* That's the worst of having a husband in evidence — a divorced woman seems so much younger.

FRANCES [*seating herself elaborately and then realizing that* MINNIE *is star-*

ing at her]. What is it? Why do you look at me like that?

MINNIE. Because you are so beautiful.

DOLLY. How do you take your tea, dear?

FRANCES. Oh I don't know that I want anything so ordinary. I just want to sit and dream that I'm in Italy again.

DOLLY. Careful of your dreams, old dear. Here, give this to her. [*She fills a cup.*] How do you take your tea — Miss a — Minnie?

MINNIE. Oh, just — a — anyway — just anyway.

DOLLY [*trying not to laugh*]. I'm laughing at *you*, George. You look so funny to-day somehow.

GEORGE [*having given a cup to* FRANCES *and going back to the tea able*]. Yes, I suppose I do — but control your mirth long enough to give her a lump of sugar.

DOLLY [*putting the sugar in the cup which is for* MINNIE]. And about four for you, I s'pose, Tollie? I wonder why men take so much sugar in their tea. Has anyone ever thought about it?

TALIAFERRO [*trying to be heard above the others as they all talk at once*]. Oh — yes. I have given it deep thought. But it's so profound a subject that I must deliberate further.

[GEORGE *strolls over to* MINNIE *with a cup of tea — munching a sandwich as he goes. He stands before her, about to give it to her, but becomes interested in what the others are saying and finally drinks the tea himself.* MINNIE *having reached for it timidly several times gives it up and she is forgotten as she sits watching wistfully.*]

FRANCES. How are you going to paint Mr. Smith, Tollie?

TALIAFERRO. I haven't decided yet.

FRANCES. I wish you didn't have to put him in ordinary clothes. I hope you'll bring out the romance of it all.

DOLLY. Oh — have you had a romance, Mr. Smith?

FRANCES. Don't be stupid, Dolly. I mean the romance of what he's done — of how he's created this great house and filled it with the feeling and tradition of the old world. It's so significant — such a symbol of his character! I seem to see you as a knight — riding with the spirit of *beauty* as your herald.

GEORGE [*chuckling and going for more tea*]. Put him on a horse, Tollie.

DOLLY. A *wingéd* horse.

SMITH. Don't kid me. I think Taliaferro will put me in a plain business suit as a plain, practical business man.

FRANCES. Horrors! *Never.* Tollie's too penetrating for that.

TALIAFERRO. It will be power, Smith — but not romantic.

DOLLY. You paint *souls*, don't you, Tollie darling?

FRANCES. Oh, I've just had the most inspiring experience of my whole life. You *must* go to this new man. He probed to the very depths of my being and *oh* the things we brought up out of my subconscious! I'm reborn. He's given me wings and flight. That's why this room affected me so — the space of it. I know now what I've been reaching for all my life. Oh, what cowards we are not to tell the truth to ourselves! If we would only *use* our power, what Godlike creatures we could be!

MINNIE [*who has been listening breathlessly*]. But how can we find that power? How can we be what we want to be?

FRANCES. By the help of these great men who are opening the doors for us and teaching us how to know ourselves.

TALIAFERRO [*to* MINNIE *with the fire of sincerity back of his artificial manner*]. You don't need *them*. Do it yourself. They *have* opened doors. They've made a great contribution — but the most important thing which is awakened in the world at the moment is not *how* we can find our own power — the God within us — but the faith that it *can* be found. That's the thing that's alive in the masses — answering the cry of humanity — the faith that Divine power *is* in us all. It's coming in many ways — through many channels — under many names. It's breaking down old doubt and fear. [*He points at* MINNIE.] Until you *believe* you can *free* that

thing that is pounding in you—it will stay shut up in you—torturing you. Until you *let* your soul speak through your music you will never have *lived.*

FRANCES. Oh—music? Is she a musician? Do play for us. That's what this room needs—to be filled with music.

DOLLY. *Do.* That will be a *great* relief. My soul needs relief and Heaven knows George's does.

TALIAFERRO. Play—*now.*

[*He looks compellingly at* MINNIE—*she rises and starts to the piano with inspiration.* WILLIE, *extremely nervous, takes a step between her and the piano. She looks at him, loses her confidence, slips on a rug and falls sprawling on the floor. They laugh—trying not to.* WILLIE *and* TALIAFERRO *go to* MINNIE *trying to get her up. The others go out into the hall, stifling their laughter.*]

TALIAFERRO [*as they get* MINNIE *to her feet*]. A little more faith, my dear.

[*He is on the verge of laughing and goes off to the others.*]

MINNIE [*overcome with humiliation*]. Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself, Willie. I wouldn't have done that for anything.

WILLIE. You surely weren't going to try to play for *these* people—were you?

MINNIE. Why—yes—I was. I thought you'd like me to. I thought that was one thing I *could* do for you.

WILLIE. I think it's just as well you fell down before you got there. They're only interested in the *best* in the world, you know. You don't seem to understand *yet* who they are.

MINNIE. Oh, they're wonderful.

WILLIE. I told you—you wouldn't know what they were talking about.

MINNIE. Yes, I know you did. I don't think I'll come to the table for dinner. I just don't think I can. I've got afraid somehow.

WILLIE [*softening*]. I'm sorry. You do what you think best. I—I'm terribly sorry, Minnie.

[*He goes out.* MINNIE *moves slowly to the piano and stands looking at it—her hands clenched desperately—an agony of appeal in her face . . .*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I.—*The same room.*

TIME.—*Nine o'clock the same evening. Voices are heard and after a moment,* DOLLY, FRANCES, TALIAFERRO, WILLIE *and* GEORGE *come into the hall and slowly down into the room. They all talk at once—with an air of having dined well and being thoroughly contented with themselves. They are in evening clothes—*DOLLY *very chic and daring—*FRANCES *startling in a rather Oriental creation.*

DOLLY [*finally heard above the others as she and* WILLIE *stand together*]. Has your musician gone under completely for the night, Mr. Smith?

WILLIE. Y-e-s, I think so. I don't think she'll be able to come down at all. She seemed extremely nervous.

DOLLY. I think you frightened her. She was paralyzed at the thought of playing for you. That's the worst of being a powerful personality—it wipes out everybody else. George is so impressed with you that he can't show off. He's really brilliantly clever you know—but when he starts to say anything to *you,* he thinks "Oh that isn't good enough"—and so he doesn't say it at all.

WILLIE. Oh, Mrs. Cadwalader!

DOLLY. Do call me Dolly. And I *must* call you Bill. I'll burst if I don't.

WILLIE. You can call me anything on earth—just so it isn't Willie.

FRANCES [*moving slowly to them*]. I shall call you William—William the conqueror.

WILLIE. William the *conquered* you mean.

DOLLY. Are you as great a lover as you are everything else?

WILLIE. Try me.

DOLLY. If it weren't for George, I would.

WILLIE. I don't see what George has to do with the case.

DOLLY. Then you're a *very* wicked man.

FRANCES. He's a very *mysterious* one. [*Gazing at him deeply as she waves her large feather fan languorously in his face.*] So many depths. Just as I think I understand him, I feel something elusive — further on.

WILLIE [*almost blinking in the strong light of their bold adulation*]. Oh, I — I think I'm a very plain simple person.

DOLLY. Yes. I expect that's what Napoleon said. By the way don't people tell you you are like Napoleon?

WILLIE. Oh, occasionally.

FRANCES. I'm wondering if your mother thinks you are.

WILLIE. No-o — but *I* think *she* is.

DOLLY. Aren't we going to see your mother at all?

WILLIE. Oh, I hope so. I hope so. She'll try to get down. It's very unfortunate this headache struck her just now. But that's the way things happen. Isn't it?

DOLLY. How?

WILLIE. Why — just when you don't want them to.

FRANCES. Oh, not with you. You compel things to happen.

WILLIE. I don't do much *compelling* with Mother.

DOLLY. Then she must be the only woman in the world who has resisted you. Oh, coffee!

[*She leaves them and goes up to the table where* REYNOLDS *and* SIMPSON *are putting the coffee, liquors and whiskey. She calls to* TALIAFERRO *and* GEORGE *who cross to her. There is general talk for a moment.* WILLIE *gives* FRANCES *a cigarette. They stroll to the center as he lights it for her.*]

FRANCES. I'm afraid I'm almost jealous of Dolly.

WILLIE. Why?

FRANCES. Jealous of her audacity — I can see you like it.

WILLIE. You don't think for a minute — I —

FRANCES. You see how frank I am. I've never known anyone who made me want to be as limpidly clear and simple as you do.

WILLIE. Oh! Mrs. Sylvester!

[DOLLY *laughs as she and the two men stroll out onto the balcony at right. Their voices are heard for a moment.*]

FRANCES [*sitting on a bench below the piano as* REYNOLDS *brings two cups of coffee down to them on a small silver tray*]. No.

WILLIE. Oh! won't you?

FRANCES. No! — no, thank you.

WILLIE. Then I won't.

FRANCES. I don't want to be *over* stimulated when I am with you. [WILLIE *laughs.*] Do you know — there isn't anything I couldn't say to you. And there's nothing you could say to me that I wouldn't understand. It's so wonderful to feel that way about a *man.* After the two tragic disappointments in my life — of disillusion and despair — after one has given and given — and found nothing but emptiness and treachery — it's very wonderful to trust a man and feel that he is your *friend.*

WILLIE [*sitting beside her on the bench*]. That's *fine.*

FRANCES. To understand and to know one is understood — to speak out one's innermost thoughts without restraint — to lay one's self bare — well, that's *living* isn't it?

WILLIE. Yes — I s'pose it is — but it's all new to me — this honesty and freedom business. You've thrown a new light on things entirely. Opened things up for me.

FRANCES. I'd rather hear *that* than anything in the world. If I *have* helped you to know your inner spiritual power then *I* have done something wonderful *too* — William.

WILLIE. But it's awfully hard for me to believe — that — well that I *have* got something great in me. This God in me — I — well — it's *new* to me.

FRANCES. That's the modesty of a great nature.

WILLIE. It's awfully nice of you to say that. But power doesn't amount to much unless we get what we want with it.

FRANCES. But *you* have everything *you* want.

WILLIE. Not everything.

FRANCES. What else could you want?

WILLIE. I think you know what I mean.

FRANCES. No — you must tell me. You must be as frank and open as I am.

WILLIE. I want what money can't buy. I want something that holds itself high — something rare and —

FRANCES. Yes?

WILLIE. And as beautiful as you are.

FRANCES. Oh — that is the most —

TALIAFERRO [*coming in from the balcony*]. Aren't you coming out to look at the moon — you two?

FRANCES. Oh, Tollie, you came at the wrong time.

TALIAFERRO. Shall I go away?

FRANCES. No, you've broken the spell. Is there a liqueur there?

WILLIE. What will you have?

FRANCES. Nothing less than nectar.

TALIAFERRO [*to* FRANCES *as* WILLIE *goes to get the liqueur*]. Not a fatal interruption, I hope. I should *be sorry to* — [FRANCES *stops him with her fan. They smile comfortably and understandingly at each other.*] You have an air of great contentment, Frances, that is very becoming. I'm sure your soul is purring softly.

FRANCES [*with a beatific smile*]. Beauty warms one, doesn't it?

TALIAFERRO. You should be very grateful to Mrs. Sylvester, Smith.

WILLIE [*bringing the liqueur to Frances*]. Grateful? I am.

TALIAFERRO. I mean for what she does to your house. She takes away the crudities and fills it with softness and grace. She gives it a *raison d'être*.

WILLIE. Oh, yes! Yes indeed. Yes *indeed!*

FRANCES. Don't listen to him, William. He's laughing at me because I'm like a kitten in the sun when I'm surrounded with things that please me.

WILLIE. Well, it must be very evident how pleased I am so see you here.

TALIAFERRO. That's putting it rather mildly, isn't it? It was inevitable that she should be here. You don't forget that it was in my studio you two met, do you?

WILLIE. Oh, no — certainly not. At least I don't.

TALIAFERRO. I foretold this then. I saw you take stock, each of the other, and say "Here at last is something that satisfies me."

FRANCES. Oh, Tollie, you embarrass me.

TALIAFERRO. Don't be commonplace, Frances. Aren't you big enough to speak honestly of a great attraction — a great harmony that was fulfilled when you two met and looked and understood?

DOLLY [*coming in from the balcony, followed by* GEORGE]. The moonlight is ravishing out there. George has just kissed me passionately on my left ear.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly.

DOLLY. That's all I'm going to tell. George is so shy. He's afraid somebody will know I do still move him passionately. It flatters me awfully. In fact it's the most flattering thing that can possibly happen to a woman — for her husband to be in love with her. Isn't that so, Tollie? Now if *you* were indecently mad about me I should know it was only novelty, but for *George* to go on year in and year out —

GEORGE. Oh, I say — nobody gives a hang about that, you know.

DOLLY. I think it's a very thrilling topic of conversation. Don't you, Tollie?

TALIAFERRO. Entirely unnatural.

DOLLY [*after laughing at* TALIAFERRO]. I want to dance. Do you dance well, Bill? *Bill,* do you dance well — with rhythmic abandon? That's what I should have been — a dancer. That's when I express myself — when I dance.

TALIAFERRO [*as he watches her dance about*]. I should like very much to see you express yourself, Dolly. Too bad we have no music. Too bad your musician failed you, Smith.

DOLLY. Too bad she fell down — so o speak.

[*They all laugh.* GEORGE *gives himself another generous whiskey and soda.*]

GEORGE. I thought she was going to be othing less than Paderewski when she tarted for the piano — and when she beegan to fall — I — thought she would ever stop.

[*They all laugh again immoderately.* TALIAFERRO *stops, seeing* MINNIE *at the entrance. The others turn to look at her and stop laughing, staring at her in wonder. She is the same* MINNIE *in the same blue dress with a new and luminous quality shining within her. The lines of the dress are long and flowing — falling away from her arms and shoulders — leaving her body quite free and well defined. Her hair is lifted into a more important line on her head. She stands and moves with grace and beauty — her voice has the vibration of conviction.*]

MINNIE. You're still laughing at me. *was* funny and oh — so stupid to be a oward in all this freedom and beauty nd understanding.

[*They watch her in amazement as she comes down the steps.*]

GEORGE [*in a low voice*]. Good for er! She's had a drink.

TALIAFERRO. *No!* You don't understand.

WILLIE [*nervously — to* MINNIE]. ou'd better go back upstairs till you eel better.

MINNIE. Oh, no — I can't go *back* — *ow.* [*To* TALIAFERRO.] As you said, hat difference does it make whether e're ridiculous or not — so long as e're alive?

TALIAFERRO. Quite so.

FRANCES. What *does* she mean?

MINNIE. I want to play for you.

[*She goes to the piano.*]

WILLIE. Minnie — don't, don't try.

MINNIE. Oh, Willie, don't be afraid r me now.

TALIAFERRO. No one can help you — r harm you — but yourself.

[*There is a pause. She begins to play — slowly, softly, a little uncertainly. They watch her tensely. She gains in sureness, and plays with inspiration — her courage mounting as the power and beauty of the music accumulate. She finishes in a crescendo of abandon.* DOLLY, TALIAFERRO *and* GEORGE *all shout bravo, applauding with excitement, exhilarated and honestly thrilled.* FRANCES *doesn't like it — the limelight being taken off herself.* WILLIE *is stupefied and extremely nervous as to what is coming next.* TALIAFERRO, DOLLY *and* GEORGE *surround* MINNIE *all talking at once.*]

DOLLY. I never was so thrilled in my life.

GEORGE. It was perfectly ripping you know. By Jove, it was.

TALIAFERRO. That was a magnificent mastery. You have destroyed the things which were destroying you.

[*They go on talking to her — she still sits at the piano listening to them with childlike happiness and gratitude.*]

GEORGE [*going back to* FRANCES *and* WILLIE.] What do you make of it? At first I thought she was lit. And now I don't know whether she is or not.

WILLIE. Certainly not. Certainly *not.* She's not a drinking person.

GEORGE. But that's just the kind that —

DOLLY [*coming to them — leaving* TALIAFERRO *bending over* MINNIE]. Did you ever see anything so thrilling in your life? Who is she, Bill? *What* is she?

WILLIE [*his fear giving way to pride*]. Did you enjoy it?

DOLLY. Tollie thinks he has performed a miracle of course.

GEORGE. *Some*body did. Something happened somewhere.

FRANCES. Oh, *I* see! William did it this way as a surprise for us. It was so clever of you to have made us think she was a failure at first. It makes her seem so much better now. Doesn't it? What?

DOLLY [*looking at* WILLIE]. Is that it? Who *is* she?

WILLIE. You — you must guess.

TALIAFERRO. She's going to play again.

MINNIE [*radiantly*]. What shall I play?

GEORGE [*who has had enough to drink by this time to free his soul somewhat*]. Play something for *me*. Play my kind of music. Do you know this?

[*He plays a few bars.* MINNIE *catches the air and goes on with it.* GEORGE *sings — getting courage as he goes —* DOLLY *urges him on, singing the refrain with him until he and everyone in the room, except* FRANCES, *have let go with complete abandon.*]

EXPRESS YO'SE'F, MY CHILE

When I was a chile, my mammy say
"Hush yo' mouf — go 'long an' play,
Don' you fuss nor fret nor cry —
You can be good ef you des try.
*Su*ppress yo'se'f, my chile.'—*Su*ppress yo'se'f."

But now dey say to a li'l chile,
"Laf and holler, sing an' cry.
What you don' wan' do don' eben try.
When you feel like yellin'— yell like hell —
*Ex*press yo'se'f an' do it well:
*Ex*press yo'se'f, my chile. — *Ex*press yo'se'f."

When I wus young an' growin' tall
Dey say "You a chile — you don't know all.
You gotta wait an' listen an' grow.
You too young an' in'cent to know.
*Su*ppress yo'se'f, my chile.'—*Su*ppress yo'se'f."

Now dey say, to a gal right out —
"Speak up plain what you t'inkin' bout.
What you feelin' let fo'kes know.
Don' hide nothin' an' say 'taint so.
*Ex*press yo'se'f, my chile.' — *Ex*press yo'se'f."

"Let all yo' emotions rise to de top.
Ef you got convolutions don't let 'em stop."
Dat's what dey say to a gal now-days.
Express yo'se'f is de latest craze.
*Ex*press yo'se'f, my chile.' — *Ex*press yo'se'f."

(The words of this song have been copyrighted in the name of RACHEL CROTHERS.)

[GEORGE *seizes* MINNIE'S *hand and* DOLLY'S — DOLLY *takes* TALIAFERRO'S — TALIAFERRO *takes* FRANCES'S. *They dance in a circle around* WILLIE — *laughing and singing "Express Yo'se'f, my Chile," dragging* FRANCES *with them.* WILLIE *doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.*]

FRANCES [*breaking away as* GEORGE *finishes with a whoop*]. Stop! It hurts me.

GEORGE. Let us be happy. [*He begins a faun-like dance by himself.*] Let us be free! Who's afraid of the truth? Not me! Not me!

[*They all shout with laughter except* FRANCES.]

DOLLY. Didn't I tell you George is a great man? If you only would release your soul, Georgie! So other people could see the greatness coming out!

FRANCES. I rather think this has gone too far.

TALIAFERRO. On the contrary we haven't gone far enough. We've had a moment of exaltation — when we felt the touch of strange wings — but we don't keep it. We let it go.

MINNIE. But *can't* we? Can't we keep it?

TALIAFERRO. *Ah!* — when we have learned to do *that* — we have learned all things. If you can *keep* the thing that made you play — you are a great artist.

MINNIE. It isn't the *playing* that matters so much, is it? But finding the thing that made me do it.

TALIAFERRO. Quite so. *Quite so.*

MINNIE. Oh, Willie — you haven't found it, have you?

WILLIE [*very nervously*]. What do you mean?

MINNIE. That innermost power.

WILLIE. Never mind now. You're excited.

MINNIE. But you're doing yourself a great wrong. You aren't letting them see what you really are.

WILLIE. Don't say any more now.

MINNIE [*shaken with a great emotional excitement which she tries to control*]. Can't you see that they don't know you? That you're hiding yourself and letting them think—

WILLIE. Don't—*please*.

MINNIE. Then I'll go. I can't stay and not say it. I don't want to be shut up again. It's too wonderful to be free just for a little while.

[*She smiles back at them wistfully as she goes off.*]

DOLLY [*after a pause*]. Am I mad—or is she?

TALIAFERRO. We're still children playing with a great fire.

FRANCES. What did she mean?

DOLLY *and* GEORGE [*singing softly*]. "Express yo'se'f, my chile. Express yo'se'f."

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

TIME: *Immediately following Scene I.*

PLACE: WILLIE'S *bedroom. This room also shows the hand of the decorator. It is empty and correct. The bed being the main feature—large and important—on a dais.* WILLIE, *still in his evening clothes, comes quickly in from the hall. He lights a cigarette and begins walking about nervously. There is a knock at the hall door.*

WILLIE. Come.—My God!

[MINNIE *rushes in quickly. She wears a very wholesome blue dressing gown. Her hair is in a braid and tied with a blue ribbon. There is about her a childlike abandon.*]

MINNIE. Oh, Willie—Willie—I can't keep still any longer.

WILLIE. What are you doing here? Go back! Go *back!*

MINNIE. I've *got* to talk to you. You're in danger and you don't know it.

WILLIE. You can't do this. Go back to your room.

MINNIE. You've got to hear the *truth*. You must listen to it.

WILLIE. What's the matter with you? You're excited. These people have stirred you up till you don't know what you're saying.

MINNIE. Oh, yes, I do.

WILLIE. No, you don't. Everything you did and said downstairs was pure excitement. Now you go and get into bed and cover up and—

MINNIE. But, Willie, I want to help you. You need it just as much as I did. You don't see. You don't *see* your danger. You're hiding your real self. You're not letting these people know what you are at all.

WILLIE. Never mind that. I tell you you can't stay here. Come on, now, and get to—

[*Trying to get her to the door.*]

MINNIE. Wait—*please!* Don't try to fight the truth, Willie. It's in yourself. Let it come out.

WILLIE. Nonsense, Minnie! You're flighty. I told you you wouldn't understand anything they said.

MINNIE. But I *do*. I understand it better than anything I ever heard in my life. They've opened the door for me. *I'm* reborn too. Don't you see? They've given *me* wings and flight and space too.

WILLIE. Stop it! *Stop* it, I say. It's upset you. You've lost your head.

MINNIE. I've just *found* myself. You told me they were something beyond—and different, but I didn't know how marvelous they are. That wonderful man the artist, has made me *free*, Willie—*free!*

WILLIE. Now you be careful. It's dangerous stuff to monkey with, I tell you. *I* understand it. *I* know where

to draw the line — but you let it alone. It's not good for you.

MINNIE. Didn't you hear me play?

WILLIE. Yes, I did.

MINNIE. Didn't you see that all I've wanted to be — and all I've wanted to *do* — came out because — *at last* — I wasn't afraid? Didn't you hear it?

WILLIE. I did — and I was darned proud of you, too. There was something in your music I didn't know you had. The excitement loosened you up. It was *fine*. Now you go to bed and to-morrow we'll —

MINNIE. But it isn't the playing that matters. That's only one little part of it. It's what I can say to *you* — now. I'm not afraid to say things that there isn't anyone else *to* say — and things that — that your life and your happiness and your — your *everything* depend on.

WILLIE. All right — all right — wait till morning and say them. You can get the whole business out of your system then.

MINNIE [*desperately*]. They *can't* wait.

WILLIE. Now — now — you're getting excited again. If you don't go back to your room, I'll call Mother.

MINNIE. It's *got* to be said before you see these people again — before you see Mrs. Sylvester. Oh, Willie, she's so beautiful and wonderful! Don't lose her.

WILLIE. *Lose* her? What do you mean?

MINNIE. You'll never hold her unless you give her more than she's ever had before.

WILLIE. Of course I can give her more than she's ever *dreamed* —

MINNIE. Oh, I don't mean that. *That* won't hold her. It must be *yourself*, and it must be a bigger self than she knows you have.

WILLIE. What?

MINNIE. She'll get tired of *pretending* that you are a great man.

WILLIE. *What?*

MINNIE. You must show her that you really *are* one.

WILLIE. What do you mean?

MINNIE. Why don't you let her *see* what you are? Why don't you show her yourself — your true — your *naked self?*

WILLIE [*jumping*]. For the Lord's sake! Some one will hear you!

MINNIE. Then you *would* be great. Then she *would* love you and respect you.

WILLIE. You're on the wrong track, Minnie, and all mixed up.

MINNIE [*not paying any attention to his protests*]. Oh, I know so well why you want to be like them. You've wanted beauty all your life — and style and — and what they have. But you're trying to get it the wrong way. You're a *sham* now, Willie.

WILLIE. I am not. I am *not*.

MINNIE. And they know it. Everybody knows it, but you.

WILLIE. Ho — *I* know what they think of me. I know. They think I'm a big person — *all* of them.

MINNIE. They're making a fool of you.

[*Stamping her foot at him.*]

WILLIE. You can't say that to me!

MINNIE. Yes, I can — and this is *why* I can say it. [*She sits on the side of* WILLIE'S *bed in complete unconsciousness but much to his amazed discomfort.*] When I did that awful thing — when I failed and fell down and humiliated you — I thought I could never live and face you again. I came upstairs and said "If there *is* anything in us that has any power — come out and save me *now!* And it *did*, Willie. It did. Something deep, deep, deep down came out and spoke to me — and told me the truth. It told me that everything that has ever happened to me is my own fault because I've been a coward all my life — a weak, miserable, little coward — afraid to live — afraid to give what I had to give. No wonder you got tired of me. It was my fault — not yours.

WILLIE. Oh now — Minnie —

MINNIE. I never let even you see the things I should have shown to you because I was afraid. And that's what you're doing now — you're hiding your

best self because you're afraid it isn't what she wants.

WILLIE. I know you mean well — but you don't understand. Now you can't stay here a minute longer, I tell you, and I mean it. You —

[*Hustling her toward the door.*]

MINNIE. Willie, this isn't *me* talking — not the outside everyday me. I may never have the courage to say this again. I know better than — than anyone else in the world how fine and sweet you are. I know how you tried not to hurt me when you told me you just *had* to go away — out — into another world.

WILLIE. That's damned nice of you, Minnie.

MINNIE. And now that you've almost got what you've always wanted, I don't want you to lose it.

WILLIE. Thank you for — that.

MINNIE. And don't you see you can hold her forever if you give her the *great* things?

WILLIE. *What* things?

MINNIE. The things that are in your soul.

WILLIE. I'm not so sure she cares so much about my soul.

MINNIE. That's just what she's reaching for — groping for — trying to understand. You heard her say — "If we only weren't afraid of the *truth* — if we only knew our own power what God-like creatures we could be!" She —

[*There is a low knock at the hall door. They stop — startled.* MINNIE *is about to speak.* WILLIE *hushes her in frantic pantomime and pushes her into a shallow clothes-closet at the Right and locks the door. The knock is repeated.*]

WILLIE [*trying to be cheerful and careless.*] Come. [*Another knock.*] Come in. Oh come *in*.

FRANCES [*opening the door slowly*]. May I — just for a moment? [WILLIE *is too appalled to speak.*] I came to beg a cigarette — one of those delicious ones you gave me out of your own case.

[*She comes into the room — leaving the door open — very exotic in her negligee — her bare feet in sandals.*]

WILLIE [*very nervous about the open door*]. A — a —

FRANCES. Oh, the door. Do you want it shut? There! [*She closes it and leans back on it.*] It *is* cosier — Isn't it? *Oh* — aren't your personal rooms interesting! And how they do express you! This is absolutely *you* — strong and austere.

WILLIE. A — think so?

FRANCES. And the cigarette? They've quite spoiled me for anything else.

WILLIE. Oh — yes. Here they are. So glad you like them. [*Getting the case from his pocket.*] Take them. A — just take the case along with you.

FRANCES [*laughing*]. Oh no. If I took them *all* and ran away it would spoil the *flavor* of just *this* one. There — thank you. [*Selecting one very daintily and putting the case back in* WILLIE'S *hand.*] And now — a light?

WILLIE. Oh — yes — I beg your pardon.

[*He finds matches and lights one after several tries — fumbling with trembling fingers.*]

FRANCES. Thanks. [*She takes a long breath and blows the smoke playfully in* WILLIE'S *face. He coughs. She sinks luxuriously into the large chair.*] Oh what bliss! This is a *real* moment. Isn't it? Away from the stupid treadmill. You're so genuine yourself — it gives me a mad passion to obey *all* my impulses. I'm *trying* to get beyond petty hypocrisies and conventions — but it's awfully hard for a woman to be really free, isn't it? A man never knows quite how hard it is. There are such eons and eons of old prejudices, and ridiculous "don'ts" to live down — aren't there? But you do *so* understand. I knew if we were alone like this, it would help me. You know why I wanted to do it — to make us look into each other's eyes as two absolutely free — *equal* human beings — not as man and woman at all. Of course, I don't believe that sex *is* the basis of all things. Not at all — at all — *at all.* I believe the spiritual is the fountain — the source of life. [*Putting two fingers seductively on his wrist.*] That's why there

can be this beautiful freedom between us.—Well—now *you* talk to me. Say something new and revealing that I've never heard before.

WILLIE [*in an agony of embarrassment, but trying to live up to the situation*] Well — I — I'm afraid you've heard everything there is to say.

FRANCES. No—not quite. Sit here—close—so nothing breaks the current of sympathy. [*Making him sit on the cushion at her feet.*] You were going to really talk when we were interrupted. I couldn't go to sleep without coming to ask you what it was. Shy deep natures like yours so seldom do express themselves. The language of the soul is so illusive — as intangible as *that.* [*Blowing a ring of smoke and pointing to it.*] If it isn't caught in the first magic moment it never tries again. That's why I came straight to you—for fear you'd think I didn't want to listen. I wouldn't have you think I'd closed the door to you for anything in the world. You said you wanted something. There's an unsatisfied longing in your eyes. What is it? Tell me.

WILLIE. A—I—

FRANCES. Oh don't be inhibited with *me.* Have you grown timid again?

WILLIE. Oh no. Oh no.

FRANCES. There *was* perfect harmony between us—till that strange woman came into the room. Then I felt a discord—something subtle and vague but very strong. Who is she? *What* is she? Why is she here with you now?

WILLIE. What?

[*With a nervous glance towards the closet door.*]

FRANCES. I seemed to get something out of the past—some link between you and her. Don't be afraid of hurting me. Tell me—whatever it is. I shall understand.

WILLIE. Well—a—I don't think I have anything in particular to say. That is—not just now.

FRANCES. *Oh*—Was I mistaken? I thought there was a sympathy between us—rare and exquisite.

WILLIE. There was. There *is.* Some other time I can talk better.

FRANCES. Did you mean what you said—or were you only being like other men?

WILLIE. I can't say—just now—what I meant. There's a good reason. A—I'll explain tomorrow.

FRANCES. I'm afraid there won't be a tomorrow. You *are* only a man—after all.

MINNIE [*pounding on the door*]. Let me out, Willie. [*A pause. She rattles the knob.*] Let me out so you can tell her the truth. [*They rise and stand petrified for a moment.*] Let me out, Willie!

FRANCES. Oh!

[*She rushes to the hall door in ignominious terror.*]

WILLIE [*running after her and stopping her as she tries to open the door*]. Wait! Wait, I say. Don't you go!

FRANCES. That woman's there! How dare you let *me* come into this room!

WILLIE. Now wait! — You — I — She—

MINNIE [*pounding on the door*]. Open the door Willie!

[FRANCES *tries to get out the hall door.*]

WILLIE [*keeping his hand on the door knob*]. Don't you leave this room! You can't go 'till you understand.

FRANCES. What?

WILLIE. It isn't like it looks at all.

MINNIE. Why don't you let me out, Willie?

WILLIE. She knows you're here. You'd better stay or it will look queer.

FRANCES [*as majestically as possible*]. How dare you say that to me!

MINNIE. Open the door, Willie, so I can go away.

FRANCES [*deciding to stay and bluff it out*]. Yes! Open it.

WILLIE. But you don't think—

FRANCES. *Open it!*

WILLIE [*hurrying over to unlock the closet door*]. Now don't you go.

MINNIE [*throwing the door open and coming out*]. *I'm* the reason he couldn't speak. *I* came on an impulse too, just as you did. But I'll go, and it will be as though it had never happened.

[*She starts for the door.*]

WILLIE. Wait, Minnie. [*To* FRANCES.] You don't think—

FRANCES. How *dare* you let her come into this house with me and my friends!

MINNIE. Oh he didn't know I was going to do this. I came to tell him something so important it couldn't wait till morning, and when you knocked I did the stupid old thing of hiding. It always makes everything wrong to hide something, doesn't it? I ought to have stood still right here and then you would have understood.

FRANCES. Don't let her speak to me! [*She starts to the door.*]

WILLIE. Wait! She didn't hide. I *put* her in there. It was a damned silly thing to do. I'm not used to women doing these things anyway. But she—It's all as straight as a string.

FRANCES. It's all loathsome and hideous!

MINNIE. Oh no—no—no—it *isn't!* You couldn't think anything wrong of Willie.

FRANCES [*to* WILLIE]. I might have *known* how common you are.

MINNIE. Oh, don't say that. He didn't know I was coming. He didn't even want me to stay. Let me tell you just exactly why I—

FRANCES. Don't speak to me. Don't *dare* to speak to me. [*To* WILLIE.] I ought to have known better than to come into this house. I shall leave as early as possible in the morning.

[*She sweeps out. They stare at the open door.*]

MINNIE [*after a pause of amazement*]. She only said that because she's hurt and angry.

WILLIE. Common! She said I was common.

MINNIE. She didn't mean it. She was angry and jealous because somebody else was here. That's natural.

WILLIE. She said she ought not to have come into this house.

MINNIE. It's all my fault. I'll go and *make* her understand.

WILLIE [*closing the door quickly*]. No you won't. You let it alone. The more you say the worse you make it.

MINNIE. But she's *got* to believe me.

WILLIE. How can you expect her to believe *you* any more than she expects you to believe *her?*

MINNIE. What?

WILLIE. She thinks you came for the same reason she did.

MINNIE. I did.

WILLIE. What?

MINNIE. She came to find your true self.

WILLIE. Oh fiddle-de-dee! She came to *get* me! By hook or by crook—she came to *get* me.

MINNIE. Willie, that's *base*.

WILLIE. Is it?

MINNIE. I heard every word she said. It was beautiful.

WILLIE. Lord, Minnie, don't you know *anything?* Nothing *any* of them said is what you think it is.

MINNIE. Oh!

WILLIE. Their wings and flight mean ego—ego—ego. They're expressing themselves all right and nothing *but* themselves—and living for themselves and getting what they want for themselves. The whole game is self.

MINNIE. You don't mean that.

WILLIE. She said she ought not to have come into this house. She'll be glad to get back into it. She'll *beg* to come back.

MINNIE. You're angry and petty now because she's hurt your *vanity*.

WILLIE. Taliaferro isn't sure he'll paint my picture in this house. He'll paint it where I *want* it painted.

MINNIE. Oh *don't!*

WILLIE. You think I'm only a cheap imitation of them. If I am they *need* me. If they've got what I want I've got what *they* want and they'll come to me and eat the dust to get it.

MINNIE. You're falling down, Willie. You're falling down. Pick yourself up again. Be big and go to her. You never needed to be so big in your life as you do this minute.

WILLIE. I don't give a damn whether I'm big or little.

MINNIE. This is twice I've humiliated you and disgraced you. It can't be. I'm going to get at her.

WILLIE. No you won't.

[*They both speak at the same time — their voices rising together in excitement.*]

MINNIE. I'm going to *make* her believe me. I'm going to tell her everything.

WILLIE. Nothing on earth could make her believe you. She'll insult you again. I won't have it.

MINNIE [*opening the door*]. You're not going to lose her because of anything I've done. That's too horrible. She sha'n't go out of this house. She *sha'n't*. I won't *let* her. [*Suddenly going back to him.*] Oh, Willie, you *are* a great man — you *are* — you've *got* to be. *Show* them you are. They don't appreciate you. Even your mother doesn't. They think your house is too big for you. You show them you're bigger than your house and more powerful than your money. There *is* greatness in you. *Get it out!*

[*She shakes him vigorously by the shoulders and hurries out.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

Same as Act I.

TIME: *8 O'clock the following morning.* REYNOLDS *is drawing back the curtains of the windows at Right and another footman at Left. The* SECOND FOOTMAN *then goes up the steps and off center.*

After a moment MINNIE *comes into the hall wearing a simple sport frock and sweater. She stops to look back and listen, then comes down into the room.*

MINNIE [*with eager excitement*]. Mrs. Sylvester hasn't come down yet — has she?

REYNOLDS [*turning with surprise*]. I beg your pardon, Miss?

MINNIE [*going down into the room*]. Has a lady — A lady hasn't come down and gone away in a motor, has she?

REYNOLDS. No, Miss — but a car is waiting for someone.

MINNIE. Oh, that's all right.

REYNOLDS. Can I do anything for you, Miss?

MINNIE. No, thank you. [REYNOLDS *starts to the entrance as the* SECOND FOOTMAN *comes back from center entrance and* SIMPSON *from the right. The three men stop as* MINNIE *speaks.*] Oh — Are you the one who took both my notes to her?

REYNOLDS. Yes, Miss.

MINNIE. There're so many of you I didn't recognize you. She wouldn't go out any other way, would she?

REYNOLDS. Oh no, Miss. She's sure to come this way.

[*The* SECOND FOOTMAN *has smiled and* SIMPSON *has reproved him with a slight cough and a severe look and dismissed him with a nod. He goes off at left,* SIMPSON *at center.* REYNOLDS *goes up the steps just as* JEAN, *the maid to* FRANCES, *enters quickly from the left. She wears a neat black suit and small hat and carries a jewel case.*]

REYNOLDS. Is Madam coming down now?

JEAN. Yes.

REYNOLDS. Someone would like to speak to her.

JEAN. Madame will not wish to be stopped.

[*She goes on out center with the intention of being very haughty.*]

FRANCES [*coming into view in the hall dressed as in Act I and drawing on a pair of long gloves*]. You may send up for my luggage now and give this note to Mr. Smith. You understand? Give it to him *yourself*.

REYNOLDS [*taking the note*]. Very good, madam. Someone would like to speak to you.

MINNIE [*moving toward them*]. I've been waiting to —

FRANCES [*quickly*]. Put this in the car.

[*Giving her veil to the servant. He goes off with the veil.*]

MINNIE. I've been waiting to see you ever since.

FRANCES. Be careful. Why do you *persist* in trying to see me?

MINNIE. I must. I want to tell you—

FRANCES. I don't want to hear anything you have to say.

MINNIE. But you *sha'n't* go away thinking what you do. Let me tell you the truth about it all—everything—every way.

FRANCES. I shall see Mr. Smith in town. *He* will tell me the truth about it all.

MINNIE. But you mustn't blame *him* for anything. He had nothing to do with it whatever.

FRANCES. I can believe that. It's very obvious you have thrust yourself upon him. You tried to compromise him—*here*—before us all. I'm sure Mr. Smith is quite, *quite* guiltless—but I can't stay in the same house with you. I'm going without saying anything to anyone—to avoid a scene and a scandal. If my friends knew, they'd leave at once.

MINNIE. Then I must make them understand.

FRANCES. What?

MINNIE. I'll tell *them* what I did.

FRANCES. You won't.

MINNIE. Of course I will.

FRANCES. You *can't!* It would ruin you.

MINNIE. But I—

FRANCES. Don't say one word. Can't you see I'm protecting you by keeping still? No matter why you were there—for any reason on earth—you can't tell it. You can't tell you were *hidden* in his room. If you're stupid enough to try to get out of this by talking you'll damn yourself. If you—

DOLLY [*coming down the steps followed by* GEORGE *and* TALIAFERRO. *They are all three in riding clothes.*] Oh, look who's here! Morning. Morning, Minnie. I dreamed about you last night. So did George. What in the name of all that's holy are you doing down here in your hat at this ungodly hour, Frances?

TALIAFERRO. Good morning. How is the genius this morning? I thought we were the only ones up to greet the sun.

GEORGE. I bet you were never up so early in your life to greet anything, Frances. What's doing?

DOLLY. George is trying to act as though he's up because he wants to be. Taliaferro is only riding because it gives him an excuse to wear those clothes. Isn't he the glass of fashion?

GEORGE. In a molded form?

DOLLY [*giggling*]. Georgie, you *are* witty—if you'd just let yourself go.

TALIAFERRO. But, for God's sake, *don't,* Georgie, I beg of you.

DOLLY. Everybody seems to be up and doing brave things but our host. Where is he?

GEORGE [*looking at* FRANCES *as she pulls nervously at her gloves*]. Are you putting on your gloves to meet him, Frances?

TALIAFERRO. Do I smell a rendezvous?

DOLLY. An *elopement!*

FRANCES. Don't be silly. I'm rushing back to town with a wretched toothache.

DOLLY. What a beastly shame! What's the matter with you, Minnie? You look as if you had a heartache.

MINNIE [*who has been waiting tensely for a chance to speak*]. I want to—

FRANCES. *No.*

DOLLY. What's the matter?

MINNIE. I want to tell you something I did last night.

FRANCES. She thinks she ought to and it isn't necessary, Mr. Smith and I know. That's quite enough.

DOLLY. It isn't quite enough till *I* know. What is it, Minnie? Tell it. It's sure to be thrilling. I dreamed you were going to play before all the great old masters and just as Mozart waved his hand for you to go to the piano—just like that—you started and stopped—and I was crossing my fingers and pushing you so hard I kicked George out of bed. That's why he's up now.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. If you only would, you know, she might say something.

MINNIE. Last night I—

FRANCES. You *can't*.

DOLLY. Why does it mean so much in your life, Frances?

FRANCES. I'm trying to make her keep still for her own sake, of course.

MINNIE. But I *want* to tell them.

DOLLY. Then for goodness sake, do.

MINNIE. Last night I—

FRANCES. It's impossible. Don't you know Mr. Smith will be very angry?

DOLLY. Heavens, is it anything serious?

TALIAFERRO. Why shouldn't she tell it if she wants to?

GEORGE. Very dangerous to suppress your desires, you know.

TALIAFERRO. Don't check the thing which carried you to those heights last night. I can't imagine you doing anything now that hasn't a spark of inspiration in it—touched by the breath of the gods.

MRS. SMITH [*who has come into the entrance in time to hear* TALIAFERRO]. I gathered from my son he was entertaining nothing less than gods and goddesses. That's why I hesitated to come down. Good morning.

DOLLY [*after they have all said good morning*]. But we knew you were there. We felt you in the background. A great man always has a great mother.

MRS. SMITH [*coming down the steps*]. You don't have to say that kind of thing to *me* in order to make conversation.

DOLLY. But I love saying it. It's my spontaneous reaction to you.

GEORGE. Shut up, Dolly. [*Going to* MRS. SMITH *to shake hands.*] How do you do, Mrs. Smith. I'm George Cadwalader.

DOLLY. In other words my husband, and that is the infamous Taliaferro who is going to paint your son's portrait—or rather his soul.

MRS. SMITH. Have you persuaded *yourself* you can do that or only other people?

[*Smiling drily at* TALIAFERRO.]

TALIAFERRO. Don't *you* think it can be done?

MRS. SMITH. *No*—I think even Willie may have a little something in him which can't be seen with the naked eye.

TALIAFERRO. Ah—that's just it. I paint with a brush which is dipped in an inner vision. Wait till you see the portrait. Your son will be revealed to you.

MRS. SMITH. I hope it will reveal him to himself. Just at present I don't think he knows whether he's God—or a tadpole.

TALIAFERRO [*laughing*]. The process of finding oneself always goes through confusion before it reaches harmony—doesn't it?

MRS. SMITH. Oh it does? Well he's been trying to confuse *me*, too. Trying to make me believe that just because somebody *wants* to do a thing it *ought* to be done.

TALIAFERRO. Don't you agree with that? Don't you believe in absolute individual freedom?

MRS. SMITH. It depends on the individual how much I believe in it.

[*Turning her dry shrewd look at* FRANCES.]

FRANCES. Isn't someone going to introduce me? I'm Frances Sylvester.

MRS. SMITH. Yes, I recognize you.

FRANCES. Oh, have we seen each other before?

MRS. SMITH. I don't think you've seen *me*. I understand *you* are a great disciple of freedom

FRANCES. Oh yes, I think it's the most important thing in the world—the complete and utter expression of oneself. I'm so sorry to have to hurry off now that you *are down*. I wanted to slip away without disturbing anyone. I thought no one would be down so early.

MRS. SMITH. I'm an early riser and a poor sleeper myself. Last night I was *unusually* wide awake.

FRANCES [*slightly startled*]. Oh—really?

MRS. SMITH. That's why I went in to see Willie so early this morning—to see how he could explain some of the —*freedom*—I seemed to feel in the air last night.

FRANCES. And *did* he?

[*Looking very steadily back at* MRS. SMITH.]

MRS. SMITH. He did a good deal of talking — but he didn't explain much.

TALIAFERRO. If you felt something strange in the air last night, dear lady, you evidently got a vibration. Quite simple. Merely thought transference. A very remarkable thing happened here in this room. You must have felt something lifted — released.

MRS. SMITH. I certainly felt something *let loose.*

DOLLY. How frightfully interesting! You must have got George's vibration. It's colossal.

MRS. SMITH. A very remarkable thing happened in another room — too, last night. [*Looking at* FRANCES.]

FRANCES [*beginning to be very uncomfortable but keeping her poise*]. You must be a bit of a mystic. You seem to be very psychic — so sensitive to conditions.

MRS. SMITH. I have very good hearing and eyesight — if that's what you mean.

DOLLY. What *are* they talking about?

MRS. SMITH. Oh — don't you know? I thought you *told* everything you do. Willie said openness was the point.

DOLLY. *Frances,* have you done something you don't want us to know?

MINNIE. Oh no, she hasn't. I can explain. Don't misjudge Mrs. Sylvester, Mrs. Smith.

FRANCES. I'm not in the habit of having what I do explained or judged or *misjudged.*

MRS. SMITH [*with a flash of anger which until now she has been able to control under her sarcasm*]. And I'm not in the habit of *any* of it. It *all* has to be explained to me.

MINNIE. But I was there all the time, Mrs. Smith. I went first.

MRS. SMITH. *What?*

MINNIE. I went to Willie's room to tell him something.

DOLLY. Oh!

MRS. SMITH. Minnie Whitcomb! Are you a plumb fool? What in the name of common sense did you do *that* for?

[*Her righteous anger blazing at* MINNIE.]

MINNIE. I had to tell him something.

MRS. SMITH. There are twenty-two other rooms in the house. I s'pose you couldn't wait till morning and tell him in one of them.

MINNIE. No I couldn't. I *couldn't* wait till morning.

MRS. SMITH. You certainly were bitten with the new doctrine. It didn't take *you* long to release yourself.

MINNIE. It's the most important thing in the world to him. I had to tell him before he saw anyone else. While I was there — there was a knock at the door.

DOLLY. Oh! it's perfect!

MINNIE. We didn't know just what to do, so Willie put me in a cupboard and locked the door.

[*A shriek of laughter from* DOLLY, GEORGE *and* TALIAFERRO.]

FRANCES. I really don't know why we should hear this.

MINNIE. And then the other door opened and Mrs. Sylvester came in.

[*They stop laughing to look at* FRANCES.]

DOLLY. *What?* [*They laugh again.*] It's too good to be true! She's making it up.

TALIAFERRO [*choking with laughter*]. And then what happened?

MRS. SMITH. Go on. Be open and frank and *free,* as Willie says.

GEORGE. Frances, what did *you* have to tell him that couldn't wait till morning?

[*Laughing so he can scarcely speak.*]

FRANCES. This is disgusting. I won't be discussed and criticized by vulgar narrow-minded ideas of convention.

DOLLY. Of course not, dear. What did you do it for — a joke?

MINNIE. Oh, no. It wasn't a joke. I could hear every word they said.

DOLLY. Oh!

[*They shout again.*]

MINNIE. Don't laugh, please. She came to —

TALIAFERRO. To what?

MINNIE. To help Willie express himself.

[*A still louder shriek of laughter.*]

GEORGE. Oh my God! And *did* he?

MINNIE. He couldn't because I was there. So I pounded on the door and told them to let me out.

DOLLY. *Never!* I can believe *anything* but that.

TALIAFERRO. You told him to let out the truth.

[*They are breathless and gasping.*]

MINNIE. *Stop laughing!* Mrs. Sylvester was angry. She didn't believe I was there for a good reason. [*To* MRS. SYLVESTER.] You said you felt something out of the past between Willie and me. There *was* something. When we were very young we were going to be married—but we weren't right for each other. He went away and I've never even seen him until now—when they asked me to come—just because they were kind. [WILLIE *comes into the entrance. No one sees him.*] I knew the moment I saw you, you were what he'd wanted all his life—but I knew you didn't appreciate him. He's big. He's wonderful. Oh he *is!* I told him he was throwing away his happiness by not letting you see how—how good he is. What if I did do it the wrong way? Why can't you believe me? [*Turning to the others.*] Can't you make her see it *couldn't* be what she thinks? [*To* FRANCES *again.*] Why *can't* you believe me? How can you help it? Why doesn't the truth in *you* see the truth in me? [*She sees* WILLIE.] Oh Willie—don't let her go. Try to make her stay.

[*She rushes out to hide the tears which are beginning to get beyond her control. There is a quick response of sympathy from* DOLLY, GEORGE *and* TALIAFERRO, *trying to hold her back.* MRS. SMITH *furtively wipes a tear from her cheek.*]

DOLLY. She's a *darling!* She's a *lamb!*

WILLIE [*coming down the steps and speaking with a very quiet firmness*]. This is a pretty good time to put ourselves to the test—isn't it? To see if we know the truth when we hear it?

DOLLY. Oh, Bill, dear, don't worry. *We* believe in fairies.

TALIAFERRO [*quite simply and with sincere feeling*]. And do we believe in the greatest of all things? Do we know when *that* has been in our midst?

FRANCES. I believe in *William.* Anger swept me away for a moment but that's gone. My higher nature has—

REYNOLDS [*coming into the entrance*]. Pardon me, Madam. Your luggage is in the car.

FRANCES. Take it out again.

[*With a magnificent gesture.*]

REYNOLDS. Very good, Madam.

[*He goes out.*]

FRANCES. *I* understand why she did it, as no one else possibly can. It hurts me to see the rest of you so horribly material. It shows me you might even misinterpret what *I* did. [*She goes up the steps.*] I'm going back to my room now, William—but I shall want to see you in a *very* little while.

[*She goes out.*]

DOLLY. Isn't she priceless! You've made a great conquest, Bill. I s'pose congratulations are in order. Let me be the first to kiss you. [*Going to* WILLIE *and kissing his embarrassed cheek.*] It's too gorgeous. So nice for George and me too. We're so fond of *both of you.* Usually we're awfully glad for one side and terribly sorry for the other. Come on fellows. Let's get started. [*Going up the steps and turning to* MRS. SMITH.] I congratulate *you,* Mrs. Smith on your daughter-in-law. She'll be so especially congenial to *you.*

MRS. SMITH [*after a slight pause*]. Shall I express *myself* now—Willie?

DOLLY. Oh, do.

WILLIE. I think it's about time for *me* to speak a little truth.

DOLLY. Oh, we know how you feel, Bill. We've all been in love.

GEORGE. It's tough while it lasts. Come on, Tollie.

WILLIE. Wait a minute, please. You've taken too much for granted. It isn't at all what you—

DOLLY. It'll be all right, Bill. Keep your nerve.

TALIAFERRO. We know she *seems* the unattainable — above and beyond all other women. But she isn't.

MRS. SMITH. One of the *overtones.* I begin to see what that means now.

DOLLY. Exactly. You won't judge her by the ordinary rules for ordinary mortals — will you, Mrs. Smith? Frances is living on too high a plane for that.

MRS. SMITH. It don't make much difference to me *what* she's living on — so long as Willie's pleased. He thinks she's a little too transcendental to be alive at all. Don't you, Willie? [WILLIE *has turned away into the window irritated and baffled.*] Willie — you deaf?

WILLIE. No. I'm listening. I get you.

MRS. SMITH. Too bad Minnie blundered in and upset things a little. She's a simple thing.

TALIAFERRO. She intrigues me peculiarly. I'm going to stay and talk to her about her future.

DOLLY. Oh not now.

TALIAFERRO. Yes now. Go on. I'm not coming. I may pick you up later.

DOLLY. You're a wretch. Come on, George. I 'spose I'll have to let you have the best horse.

GEORGE. By all means, darling. Why not?

[GEORGE *and* DOLLY *go.*]

TALIAFERRO. I have a strong sense of responsibility for her.

WILLIE [*a little aggressively*]. What do you mean by that?

TALIAFERRO. I have awakened her — roused her to a realization of her own power and what life may have for her if she will take it.

MRS. SMITH. Is he talking about *Minnie,* Willie?

WILLIE [*not listening to his mother*]. Excuse me, but I don't know why you should feel *that.*

TALIAFERRO. Ah — don't you? And if you don't — why then you don't. I can't explain it.

WILLIE. You don't have to *explain* anything to *me* about Miss Whitcomb.

MRS. SMITH. Lord no! She's just one of those unfortunate women that's got nothing in 'em *to* explain.

TALIAFERRO. I presume you realize she has the potentialities of a great musician?

WILLIE. I'd much rather not discuss Miss Whitcomb's *potentialities* with anyone but herself.

MRS. SMITH. Why not, Willie? If the gentleman could do anything to help Minnie, it would be good. She's been helping *other* people to make music all her life.

TALIAFERRO. That's why her own pent-up song has gushed forth with such power.

MRS. SMITH. What?

WILLIE. You didn't hear her play last night, mother. My guests were astounded. They began to realize that a very extraordinary person is in the house.

MRS. SMITH. You don't mean *Minnie!*

TALIAFERRO. All she is — her soul, her mind — her sex — her love — have gone into that silent music. Something has happened to her sometime to make her think she could only stand by and look on at life.

MRS. SMITH [*watching* WILLIE *out of the corner of her eye*]. What do you s'pose that could be, Willie? I've known her since she was a baby. Don't upset her with foolish ideas. Willie warned her. He had told her she wouldn't understand your language — and you see — she's gone and taken you literally. She's spilled her soul right out on the carpet for you all to step on.

TALIAFERRO. Well — isn't that better than to go on crushing it and suppressing it as completely as she has been doing?

MRS. SMITH. I'm not so sure about that. If we were all running around without any *suppressions,* we might as well have tails again.

TALIAFERRO [*laughing*]. I don't get a sense of much suppression on your part, dear lady.

MRS. SMITH. You don't! Well I'm suppressing more this minute than most people feel in a life time. If I was to let go now — God help Willie.

[*She rises firmly and goes up the steps.*]

TALIAFERRO [*laughing and following her*]. I think I recognize in you an individuality almost as natural and untrammelled as my own. We ought to appreciate and understand each other.

MRS. SMITH. You flatter me. I don't even understand my own son. When you've painted that portrait I may be able to see some of these hidden mysteries. I'll tell Minnie to come right down — you want to talk to her.

[*She goes up the steps.*]

TALIAFERRO. Yes — do please.

MRS. SMITH. And you keep your eye on her, Willie. You began it. You're responsible. Now that she's cut loose, there's no telling what she may do. Minnie's been bottled up a good many years. When she pops — look out.

[*She goes off Left.*]

TALIAFERRO [*going back to* WILLIE]. By the way — *about* your portrait. I've decided —

WILLIE [*coming quickly toward* TALIAFERRO, *a little fiercely*]. What are you going to say to her?

TALIAFERRO. Well — I'm not going to make improper advances. At least not just *yet*. I shall paint you sitting because that won't show how short your legs are.

WILLIE. I've decided a few things about that portrait myself. My legs aren't quite so short as you think. What are you going to say to her?

TALIAFERRO. Well really! Is that a challenge? I may talk to a genius about her work and how to bring it before the world. May I not?

WILLIE. I don't know that Miss Whitcomb wants to be put before the world, and if she does *I'll* do it.

TALIAFERRO. But, my dear man, must I remind you that there are things that money can not do?

WILLIE. For instance?

TALIAFERRO. It can't open the doors of the holy of holies. I shall get an audience of musicians of the first rank — in my own studio.

WILLIE. I don't want her playing in *anybody's* studio. Besides an audience of musicians would be the worst thing that could happen to her. They'd tear her limb from limb.

TALIAFERRO. Ah — the artist listens with passionate appreciation — born of his own travail and agony and accomplishment. [MINNIE *comes into the entrance.*] Come in, dear lady. You have moved me profoundly — both your music and yourself. I am at your feet to serve you.

[*He puts out both his hands to her. She comes down the steps and gives him her hands. He kisses them.*]

MINNIE. Oh! What does he mean, Willie?

WILLIE. I'm sure I don't know.

TALIAFERRO. You must be heard. You must give your great gift to the world — not bury it.

MINNIE. Do you mean you think I could do something with my music — out in the world?

TALIAFERRO. Isn't it pushing you — compelling you — screaming within you to be let out?

MINNIE. Yes — yes — it is.

WILLIE. I'm sure you mean well, Taliaferro, but you're going too fast. We'll have to weigh and consider it rationally, Minnie, before you decide anything.

MINNIE. Oh, Willie, you don't understand. [*Giving her hands to* TALIAFERRO *again.*] How shall I begin?

TALIAFERRO. You played last night with your soul. It was the supreme effort of your inner being to make itself articulate. Serious faults and crudities — yes — of course.

WILLIE. Nonsense! I didn't see any faults.

TALIAFERRO [*to* WILLIE]. No — you wouldn't. [*To* MINNIE *again.*] You must get to the great teachers in Europe.

WILLIE. Ho! The great teachers can come over here to her. That's easy.

MINNIE [*laughing*]. You funny little boy! You don't understand. [*To* TALIAFERRO.] If I had only known you before! So much time has been wasted.

TALIAFERRO [*kissing her hands again*]. We don't measure life by time — but by living.

WILLIE. Would you like to take a walk or a drive, Minnie? It's a beautiful morning.

TALIAFERRO. A marvelous career lies in these beautiful hands if you are faithful to it.

MINNIE. I haven't anything else to be faithful to.

WILLIE. Now, Minnie!

MINNIE. It's like a miracle to have found you. You've made me alive! *I'm* not afraid *now* to give you all *I* have.

WILLIE. Be careful, Minnie,—you don't realize what you're saying.

TALIAFERRO. She is speaking the language of one artist to another. You don't understand.

WILLIE. Don't worry about what I don't understand. We'll talk about it all—later, Minnie.

TALIAFERRO. Do I get a slight suggestion that you would perhaps like to be alone with the lady? I'll go.

MINNIE. Oh! no! Don't.

TALIAFERRO [*going up the steps*]. But I'll come back. There's enough for all of us pulling together in a long hard pull to get you where you want to go. Don't let anything destroy your faith in yourself. When your spirit falters, come to me. Let me give you strength out of my infinite belief in you. And above all things don't let the *commonplace* drag you down. Au revoir, dear lady. [*He strides out.*]

MINNIE. Isn't he wonderful?

WILLIE. He's a windbag. I never knew anybody who likes to hear himself talk so well. See here, Minnie, how much does this music business mean to you?

MINNIE. Everything.

WILLIE. Wouldn't you rather be happy as a woman than a successful musician?

MINNIE. This will be more than just happiness. Think of playing to hundreds of people—all at one time—making them hear what I've always heard—feel what I feel! Oh! *God*—how wonderful it will be!

WILLIE. Listen, Minnie. No matter how much of a success you are, you have to have somebody to take care of you.

MINNIE. Oh no. I'm not used to that. It would hamper me. I must be free. When I think of what I'm going to do, my heart pounds so I can't breathe. There's a singing in my veins—a throbbing.

WILLIE. Are you thinking of that man Taliaferro?

MINNIE. All the time.

WILLIE. Take everything he says with a grain of salt. Temperament—guff.

MINNIE. He's an artist. I trust him absolutely.

WILLIE. You can't trust *any* of 'em. They're all loose.

MINNIE [*smiling at him*]. That will be so good for me. [*Suddenly growing serious.*] Oh, Willie—what if I *am* great—really and truly great? What if I *have* got the divine spark?

WILLIE. I wouldn't count on that. Very few of us have. See here—what ever made you think there was anything great in me?

MINNIE. It began when I was a little girl I 'spose—when we used to play in the barn and you were always the king.

WILLIE. But after I went away—did you—Did you still go on—Did you go on caring a little—in the old way?

MINNIE. Oh yes—I kept you with me. I had to have something. Every evening all these years we've met on the church steps in the same old way—under the clock. You said the things I wanted to hear you say. It was so real that if anyone passed I was proud that you were with me and not ashamed that you had forgotten me. If another woman went by with her husband or her lover or her baby I knew she had something of grief or disappointment in her happiness—while I had only the ideal of it all. Then when we stood up and you walked with me to the gate I went into the little empty house with something that made the next day easier—with places of great shining in it. You were noble and splendid. That's the way you've been to me always and when I came—

WILLIE. You saw I was only a conceited fool.

MINNIE. Yes.

WILLIE. What? You do think that—do you?

MINNIE. You'll get over it—if you're just honest, Willie. If you just tell the truth to yourself.

WILLIE. Well, by golly, the toothpaste is honest. There isn't an ounce of fake in it—and it's *me*—and it's going to get me what I want. If I can't be great you can. I'll advertise you from pole to pole and make you the biggest one of 'em all.

MINNIE [*laughing*]. You sound like your old self now.

WILLIE. I'm going to take care of you, Minnie.

MINNIE. Oh, you don't need to do that.

WILLIE. Yes I do.

MINNIE. *No!* I can take care of myself. I always have.

WILLIE. I want to marry you.

MINNIE. *Oh*—be careful, Willie! We'll get into trouble again.

[*Moving quickly away from him.*]

WILLIE. You belong to me, Minnie. You always did. You used to care. Why don't you now? I'm much more worth caring about now than I used to be.

MINNIE. Oh no, you're not. Not to me. For Mrs. Sylvester, yes. She *wants* you. You're just what she wants and she's just what you want.

WILLIE. What do *you* want?

MINNIE [*after a deep breath*]. To express myself.

WILLIE. You can express yourself and marry me too.

MINNIE. No I couldn't. I must be *free*. You don't understand, Willie. We speak a different language. My music—my art—my inner life don't mean anything to you.

WILLIE. Don't you fool yourself. I can keep up with you. Art's all very well for a little while—but in the long run nothing matters but love—love, Minnie. You want something to sit by the fire with.

MINNIE. But I've learned to do without love and the fire.

WILLIE. That's no reason you can't have it now. It's all the bigger when it does come. [*Taking her hands.*]

MINNIE [*trying to get away*]. You mustn't, Willie.

WILLIE. Look at me.

MINNIE. No! I want to go.

[*Backing away from him and sitting on the bench by the piano.*]

WILLIE. I'm never going to stop till I get you.

MINNIE. This isn't right!

WILLIE. Right—hell! I want you. I'll be good to you. I'll make you happy. I'm going to give you the whole world. I'm crazy about you, Minnie.

[*Holding her as she sits and kissing her lips in a long kiss.* FRANCES *comes down the steps and stops in horrified amazement.*]

FRANCES. Are you at it *again?*

MINNIE. He didn't mean it.

WILLIE. Certainly I meant it. *I'm* free. *I've* got wings and space and flight and I'm going to fly, too.

MINNIE. Don't, Willie—don't. *Stop!*

FRANCES. What does this mean?

WILLIE. I'm expressing myself all right—and I'm going to keep right on.

[*They all talk at once.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

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Other plays of similar character:

Nice People (Rachel Crothers)
Suppressed Desires (Susan Glaspell)
The Show-off (George Kelly)

QUESTIONS ON "EXPRESSING WILLIE"

1. Criticize the dialogue. Illustrate your remarks.
2. Is any character overdrawn?
3. What is Miss Crothers' attitude toward self-expression?
4. Is the play a high comedy?
5. What light does the play throw on contemporary society?
6. Comment on the satire of the play.

HATCHER HUGHES

The theatre-goer of a quarter of a century ago became well acquainted with a popular and conventional melodrama dealing with the mountaineers of the South. There was little attempt to interpret intelligently the life of these isolated peoples, whose ways of living seem strangely anachronistic in the modern world and whose English seems almost a foreign tongue with its quaint Elizabethan flavor. The plots of these melodramas usually centered about complications arising from a love affair between a revenue officer and a moonshiner's daughter, or between a young man and a young woman belonging to families engaged in a bitter feud. The humor was almost invariably supplied by a negro farmhand whose traditional fear of guns and shooting never failed to delight. There was no attempt at characterization or at a sympathetic and honest understanding of the mountain folk.

It has remained for Percy MacKaye, Lula Vollmer, and Hatcher Hughes to sense the genuine literary possibilities of the mountaineers. In the mountains of Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia linger descendants of the original settlers of the United States, cut off geographically from the "civilizing" forces which have transformed other areas, and retaining habits of living, language, and thought much like those of their ancestors of more than two hundred years ago. Among others, Percy MacKaye has made a painstaking study of these people, living among them and making copious notes concerning their traditions, ballads, and folkways. The best dramatic fruit of his investigation is *This Fine Pretty World* (1923). Lula Vollmer's *Sun Up* (1923), a folk play of the Carolina mountains, won critical as well as popular approval. The best of the mountain plays, however, is Hatcher Hughes' *Hell Bent Fer Heaven,* winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1923.

Hell Bent Fer Heaven has its melodramatic touches, but the melodrama is convincingly motivated; and in addition to the exciting plot and valid dialogue, there are countless subtle inferences as the characters are exposed psychologically. The main interest of the story centers around Rufe Pryor, a religious fanatic whose ecstasies and self-deceptions scatter the seeds of tragedy wherever he goes. As do Eugene O'Neill in *Diff'rent* and Somerset Maugham in *Miss Thompson,* Mr. Hughes touches on the problem of repressions and their revolting consequences. Rufe Pryor is a religious neurotic, whose mania provokes him to sadistic cruelties. Although it is extremely difficult to agree with Mr. Benjamin de Casseres that Rufe is a broad caricature of the grotesqueness of American life, it is true that he does possess a blood kinship with certain types of the religious fanatic whose emotional and frenzied neurosis is not uncommon in backwoods communities and not unknown in urban centers. The dialogue of *Hell Bent Fer Heaven* is particularly satisfying. Although a little less wild and poetic, the language is beautiful like that of the Irish peasant plays of Synge, and has just as authentically the rhythms and inflections of genuine folk-speech. In the more emotional scenes there is an almost lyrical quality like that of the emotional scenes of Dorothy and Du Bose Heywood's *Porgy.* The humor is quaint and unforced, arising naturally and easily out of situation and character.

Hatcher Hughes, the author of *Hell Bent Fer Heaven,* is a professor of English literature at Columbia University, New York. He is the author also of *Ruint* (1925) and collaborator with Elmer Rice in *Wake up, Jonathan* (1921). Professor Hughes, who teaches classes in dramatic composition, is a brilliant exception to whatever truth may be in George Bernard Shaw's caustic generalization: "He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches."

HELL BENT FER HEAVEN
(1923)

BY

HATCHER HUGHES

CHARACTERS

David Hunt
Meg Hunt
Sid Hunt
Rufe Pryor
Matt Hunt
Andy Lowry
Jude Lowry

Scene: The Hunt home in the Carolina mountains. The action takes place between four o'clock in the afternoon and nine o'clock at night on a midsummer day.

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HELL BENT FER HEAVEN

ACT I

Interior of MATT HUNT'S *home in the Carolina mountains. The walls and ceiling are of rough boards, smoked and stained with age. The furniture is old and hand-made.*

The place is neat and home-like in the old-fashioned way. At the left, toward the rear, is a rough staircase with crude balustrade. Under the staircase, facing the right wall, is a small door opening into the cellar. To the right of this there is another door leading into the kitchen.

The outside door is in the rear wall and opens directly on a porch covered with flowering shrubs. A "Red Rambler" rose hangs over the doorway on a trellis. There are windows on each side of the door, through which you catch a glimpse of a river valley with mountains in the background. To the left of the door is a gun rack with ancient and modern firearms.

It is late afternoon and the bright sunlight, visible through the doors and windows, is tempered by the lengthening shadows. A bluish vapor hangs over the river, half concealing the distant peaks of the mountains.

Old DAVID HUNT *enters from without. He is a rugged, well-preserved man of eighty. His snow-white hair and beard contrast vividly with the ruddy glow of his face. The peculiar radiance of countenance that comes with serene old age is heightened in him by the brilliant sunlight, which brings into full relief a personality that is rich, humorous, and mellow without a touch of sentimentality. He carries an old muzzle-loading rifle, which he places in the gun rack after removing the percussion cap.*

A moment later his daughter-in-law, MEG HUNT, *a strong, active woman of forty-odd, enters from the kitchen, carrying an earthenware bowl full of garden peas.*

MEG. Whew! I declar—it's hot enough in that kitchen to brile bacon 'thout a fire!

[*She sits down and begins to shell peas.*]

DAVID [*mops his face*]. It's hot 'nough everywhar to-day.

MEG. I reckon it'll storm ag'in afore night.

DAVID. If it don't it'll miss a good chance.

MEG. Whar you been?

DAVID. Up along the river. I thought I might run across that hawk that's been arter your young turkeys.

MEG. Did you see it?

DAVID [*seats himself and helps her shell peas*]. Not close enough to speak to him. But I didn't foller him fur. I thought I'd kinder like to be around when Sid gits home.

MEG [*glances toward the door uneasily*]. Seems quair they hain't come yit. With Matt a-leavin' here at daybreak they'd ought ha' been home two hours ago.

DAVID. Well, it takes time on a day like this. Matt ain't a-goin' to push them colts up the mountain this weather. An' Sid, apt as not, didn't git thar on time. He never wus a lad to be governed by clocks [*chuckles softly*] ner nothin' else under the sun 'at I ever hyeard of!

MEG. I wonder what he'll be like now! Mebby the war's changed him!

DAVID. Mebby so.

MEG. When it fust started I mind they wus lots in the papers about our soldiers a-goin' into battle a-prayin' an' readin' their Bibles. Sid allus wus good about readin' his Bible.

DAVID [*chuckles slyly*]. Yeh, 'specially the fightin' parts. [*She starts slightly and a shadow crosses her face.*] But don't you worry about Sid. He'll settle down. They's plenty o' time fer that. [*Beaming with unconscious pride.*] I used to be jist like him when I was a lad, an' now look at me. You don't see me a-tearin' around the country on hossback a-cussin' an' raisin' Ole Ned.

MEG. No; but I wouldn't put it past you if you had the strength.

DAVID. Hey?

MEG. It's your flesh that's got religion, not your sperit.

DAVID [*laughs good-naturedly*]. I ain't denyin' it, though I reckon you'd like it better if I 'us ashamed o' havin' been young an' strong. You're jist like all women, Meg. When they find a man's got a little sap in him they think he's headed straight fer the devil.

[*Horses are heard in the distance.* MEG *springs up excitedly.*]

MEG. Thar! I *know* that's them!

DAVID. It sounds like it—from here. [*Shading his eyes with his hand, he looks up the river, while she peeps over his shoulder.*] It's Matt, all right, but I don't see Sid.

MEG [*turns away querulously*]. Well, it's no more 'n I expected! I've had a feelin' ever sence they took him across that ocean that I'd never see him ag'in!

[SID, *dressed in civilian clothes, with khaki shirt and hat, enters from the kitchen, eating a large piece of pie. He is a handsome and vigorous young fellow, with the unmistakable slouch of the mountaineer.*]

SID. Hello, Mam!

MEG. Sid! [*She hugs him, with tears in her eyes. He laughs and pats her on the back, taking another bite of pie.*] What 'd you sneak in through the kitchen an' skeer me like this fer? I thought you hadn't come!

SID. I didn't sneak. I jist nachelly come around to the place whar the cookin's done. [*Shaking hands with* DAVID.] H'lo, Gran'pap! How ai you?

DAVID. I can still lick any eighty-year-old man my size in the mountains if I can ketch him.

SID [*laughs and turns his attention to* MEG *again*]. Well, Mam, it seems right nachel to see you ag'in. How you been makin' out?

MEG. I've been jist about as common I worried lots about you. An' you ain't a-lookin' none too fat. I'll bet you hain't had nothin' fit to eat sence you left home.

SID. Shucks! I'm all right! Better 'n when I went away.

DAVID. You 'pear to me to be about as sassy as ever. I reckon you knowed you 'us a hero?

SID. Yeh, I read about it in the papers

DAVID [*makes a face and spits*]. The things they've printed about you' enough to make a healthy man spew I'll bet if the truth 'us knowed you didn't do half as hard fightin' as I done in the Confederate war!

SID [*grins mischievously*]. You didn' have as many notches on your gun when you got back.

DAVID. Mebby I wusn't as big a lia afore I went.

SID. You didn't have to be; you wusn't a-goin' to as big a war.

DAVID. Size ain't everything in a war They was bigger men in the one I went to!

SID. Well, I dunno. We had Pershin an' Fotch.

DAVID [*contemptuously*]. Pershin' an Fotch! Chiggers an' seed-ticks! Knee high to a gnat 'longside o' Stonewa Jackson an' 'obert E. Lee!

MEG. Lord! Sid hain't no more ' stepped in the house, an' you sta fightin' your ole wars all over ag'in!

DAVID [*chuckles wisely*]. She's dis p'inted in you, Sid. You're too robu tious to suit her. She's been hopi you'd come back sorter peakin' a pinin' so she could mammy you a fatten you up.

MEG [*looks at him quickly with a sta*

tled expression]. What ever put that notion in your head?

DAVID. Well, I've noticed that you allus pay more attention to the runts among the pigs an' chickens than you do to the healthy uns.

[RUFE *appears at the top of the stairs, unobserved by the others. He is thirty, of medium height, with pale face and shifty, uncertain manner.*]

MEG. They need more — jist like humans. When the Saviour was on earth he ministered to the halt an' blind an' didn't bother about t'others. What's the use in doin' fer folks like you an' Matt? You've neither of you ever been sick a day in your life.

DAVID. I ain't complainin'. A man cain't have everything in this world. An' as a constancy I'd ruther have a good stomach an' sound sleep as affection from women.

RUFE [*comes downstairs, smiling at* DAVID *with an expression of great compassion and humility*]. I reckon that's a hint that I'm bein' treated too well here.

DAVID. No; I didn't even know you was in hearin' distance, Rufe. I thought you 'us out thar 'tendin' the store.

RUFE. Well, whether you meant it er not, I want you to know 'at I agree with you. I know I don't deserve the blessin's of a home like this an' a woman in it that's as good to me as my own mammy that died when I 'us little! If she'd ha' lived I might ha' been more deservin'.

MEG. Sid, you rickollect Rufe, don't you, that use' to work fer Joe Bedford down on Sandy Fork?

SID. Shore, I do. You're the feller that's been a-helpin' Pa while I 'us away. [*He shakes hands cordially. There is a suggestion of constraint in* RUFE'S *manner.*] How's your health?

RUFE. I cain't brag on myself much.

SID. What's the trouble? You're lookin' all right.

RUFE. Yeh, I am, on the outside. The thing's in here [*taps himself on the stomach*], whatever it is. I tried to git in the army arter you left, but they wouldn't have me.

DAVID. Fust I ever hyeard of it, Rufe.

MEG [*with a show of annoyance*]. Well, it's not the fust I've hyeard of it. Rufe don't tell his business to everybody.

DAVID. What post did you go to to git edzamined — if 'tain't no secret?

RUFE. I wusn't edzamined by no army doctor. I wus a-goin' to be, but a man down at Pineville looked me over an' said it wusn't no use.

DAVID. Wus he a doctor?

RUFE [*evasively*]. Not edzackly; but he had worked fer one a' knowed how to edzamine folks.

DAVID [*chuckles*]. Oh, I see! Like the man by playin' the fiddle: he'd seed it done! Well, them army doctors wouldn't ha' been so pertickler, jedgin' by some o' the samples I seen that got by 'em.

RUFE. I hyeard they let the bars down toward the end. But I'd jist as soon stay out of a fight if I cain't git in tell it's over.

SID. That's the best time to git in.

RUFE [*looks at him in surprise*]. Did you like fightin'? One o' the papers here said as how you took to it like a fish to water.

SID [*laughs ironically*]. Shore, I did! It 'us pie to me!

DAVID. That's another lie, Sid!

[SID *laughs.*]

RUFE. Well, I reckon a man can have too much o' anything. But I b'lieve I'd like war if I had the health to stand up under it. [DAVID *grunts incredulously.*] I dunno why, but my mind seems to run nachelly to fightin'.

DAVID. That's because your legs 'ld run nachelly t'other way.

MEG [*annoyed*]. You've never seed 'em run, have you?

DAVID. No; but he comes of a peaceful family. I mind his gran'daddy durin' the Confederate war. He wus so peaceful that he knocked his front teeth out tell he couldn't bite the ends offen the paper cater'ges we used then, so he wouldn't have to go.

RUFE. He didn't b'lieve in fightin' about niggers! He'd ha' fit all right if

he'd had as much to fight fer as Sid had!

DAVID. What did Sid fight fer? I'll bet *he* don't know.

SID. Then you got another bet comin'. I fit to lick t'other side!

DAVID. Well, you're the fust un I've seed that knowed, an' I've axed lots of 'em. An' I reckon our men wusn't the only ones. That gang o' Germans that you got a medal fer ketchin' must ha' been kinder hazy in their minds about the needcessity o' fightin'. [*He pats himself significantly on the stomach.*] I'll bet they had some sort o' inside trouble — like Rufe.

SID [*laughing*]. I know dern well they did!

RUFE. How'd you find it out, Sid? You couldn't talk their talk, could you?

SID. No, but I could tell by the way they acted. Soon as each seed t'other we both started to run. But I looked back first. When I seed they wus a-runnin' away, too, I tuk after 'em a-hollerin' an' shootin' like hell had broke loose, an' the whole bunch surrendered!

RUFE. An' they give you a medal fer it! Why, I could ha' done that!

DAVID. You might, Rufe, if you'd ha' thought to look back. [*He turns to* SID.] I reckon their army had found out they wus peaceful folks an' put 'em out thar to git ketched. The dam Yankees use' to do that. An' from what I've hyeard o' these here Germans they're jist a bastard breed o' Yankees.

MEG. Whar is your medal, Sid?

SID. I cain't show it to you now. I busted the last button offen my drawers while ago an' I got 'em pinned up with it.

[MATT HUNT, *a vigorous mountaineer of forty-five, appears on the doorstep and begins stamping the mud off his boots. He carries a lap robe and a "slicker" across his arm.*]

SID. But here comes Pap. He's got sompen I can show you. [*To* MATT.] Ha' you got that package fer Mam?

MATT [*fumbling under the lap robe*]. Yeh, it's here som'ers.

MEG. What is it?

MATT [*throwing the package into her lap*]. You'll have to ax Sid. He fetched it.

SID. It's some sort o' female sompen that a French gal asked me to bring you. I dunno what you'd call it.

MEG [*turning the package over doubtfully*]. Umn! If all I've hyeard about them gals over thar's so, I dunno's I want it.

DAVID [*starts to take it*]. Le' me see it.

MEG [*taking it away from him*]. Yeh. I'll bet you'd take it! [*She opens the package gingerly and takes out a beautiful lace brassière.*] La! Did she knit this herself?

SID. I reckon so. She 'us allus a-piddlin' at sompen like that.

MEG [*holds it up to the light admiringly*]. Umn-umph! It's purty enough, but I hain't the least notion what it's fer!

DAVID. Ahem! Does she look anything like her knittin', Sid?

SID. Yeh, some.

MEG. Well, I hope you cain't see through her as easy. [SID *laughs.*] You didn't let her fool you up with her good looks, did you?

SID. Well, I didn't fetch her back with me, like some of 'em done.

DAVID. If you had, I know a gal here that 'ld ha' scratched her eyes out.

[RUFE *rises nervously and crosses the room.* MEG *glances at him sympathetically.*]

MATT. Whar you goin', Rufe?

RUFE. Nowhere. I jist got tired o' settin' in one place.

DAVID [*laughs knowingly*]. Rufe allus gits tired o' the place whar he's a-settin when you start talkin' about Jude Lowry.

MEG. I don't blame him. You talk so much about gals they ain't nothin' new left to say about 'em.

RUFE. I reckon they air jist about alike the world over. Wus the French uns after you all the time, Sid, same a them here?

SID. I cain't say 'at I 'us bothered by 'em much.

DAVID. I'll bet you wusn't lonesome

An' you won't be here. They're lots bolder 'n they wus when you left. They's times now when I don't feel safe myself. If I 'us your age I'd marry Jude Lowry er some other gal fer pertection. Give me a woman every time to fight a woman.

[*At mention of* Jude Lowry, Rufe *gets up again and moves toward the door aimlessly.*]

Matt. Air you jist changin' your settin' place ag'in, Rufe, er air you goin' out to the store?

Meg [*with a sudden flare of temper*]. What difference does it make to you which he's a-doin'?

Matt. None in pertickler. Only I thought if he 'us a-goin' out thar he could fetch Sid's pack in when he come back.

Rufe [*with an expression of martyrdom*]. All right, Matt, I'll fetch it. O' course what you hired me fer wus to tend the store. But I'll be a nigger fer Sid — er anything else you ax me!

Matt [*rises angrily*]. What's that you're a-bellyachin' about now?

Rufe. I ain't a —

Matt [*storming impatiently*]. Air you a-goin' to get that pack er not?

Rufe. Why, I jist told you I wus!

Meg. Didn't you hear him say it? They ain't no need in bawlin' at him like that! He's got feelin's, like the rest of us!

Sid. Hold on, Paw. I don't want to be the cause o' no fracas. I've toted that ole pack all over the world an' 'tain't a-goin' to hurt me to fetch it this much further.

Matt. No, you stay whar you air! He's got out of enough work here!

Rufe. I ain't a-tryin' to git out o' nothin'! I'm a-tryin' hard to do anything you ax me, no matter what it is!

[*He goes out.*]

Matt. I never knowed nobody to git me r'iled up like he does. [*To* Sid.] That's the kind o' help I've had while you 'us away.

Sid. Yeh, I've seed folks like him — kinder tetchy.

Meg. It's enough to make him tetchy, with your paw an' granpaw a-pickin' on him all the time jist 'cause he ain't as big an' strong as they air.

David. You don't ketch me an' Matt a-pickin' on chil'en jist 'cause they ain't as big an' strong as we air. I've noticed when folks git picked on it's gene'ly 'cause they deserve it.

Meg. You could git along 'ith Rufe if you tried.

Matt. Yeh, I expect we could if we laid awake nights figgerin' how to keep from hurtin' his feelin's — like you do. 'Tain't only he's tetchy — though God knows I'm sick o' hearin' him bellyache — but he's lazy er born tired, I dunno which. Why, he ain't wuth his salt!

David. 'Specially sence he got that camp-meetin' brand o' religion. I've never seed a man so hell-bent fer heaven as he is!

Rufe [*enters with the pack and sets it down*]. Thar 'tis, Sid.

Sid. Much obliged, Rufe.

[*He takes the pack and opens it.*]

Rufe. No 'casion. I'm glad to do anything I can to please Matt.

Matt. Well, I got jist one thing more fer you to do. I want you to pack up your duds an' make tracks away from here.

[Rufe *is dumfounded. He looks at* Meg *appealingly.*]

Meg. Matt! You ain't a-goin' to turn him off at this time o' year?

Matt. Course I am. I didn't adopt him fer life when I hired him. I told him he could stay tell Sid come back.

Meg. But he cain't git another clerkin' job. An' it's too late to start a crap now.

Matt. He'd orter thought o' that afore. He's knowed fer a month that Sid wus comin' home.

Rufe. He's right, Meg. I might ha' knowed this 'ld happen. [*He goes toward* Matt *with a malicious expression.*] But I'm a-goin' to tell you sompen fer your own good, Matt. God so loved the world that he give His only begotten Son to die so 'at everybody 'at wanted to might be saved. But you've never took advantage o' His offer. I cain't understand that in a close trader like you, Matt. If the offer o'

free salvation 'us a box o' free terbacker fer the store you'd never let it git by. [MATT *makes an angry move.* RUFE *backs away.*] Understand, I'm a-sayin' this in a true Christian sperit — fer your own good. The Scripture says to love our enemies an' do good to them that despitefully uses us.

MATT. Dadburn you, I don't want you a-lovin' me, ner doin' good to me, nuther!

RUFE. I know you don't, Matt. But I cain't help it — an' you cain't, neither! That's one thing you ain't the boss of!

MATT [*menacingly*]. Go on up an' pack your duds an' git out o' here!

RUFE [*backing away towards the stairs*]. All right, Matt. You're the boss o' that. You can hector me an' bully me about the things o' this world, but you cain't keep me from lovin' your immortal soul. An' you cain't take away my reward which is in heaven. An' you cain't escape yourn — which ain't!

[*He disappears upstairs.* MATT *glares after him, his right arm trembling significantly.*]

MEG. It's the truth that hurts, Matt. Your reward *ain't* in heaven.

MATT [*raging inwardly*]. I wish he'd go thar er *som'ers* an' git hisn!

DAVID. I cain't make him out. If he 'us jist a plain hypocrite I'd know how to take him. But he 'pears to honestly b'lieve everybody's got to be like him afore they're saved.

MEG. Mebby they *has* got to be different from you an' Matt.

SID. Pap, if you don't want him in the store, does it happen to be so's you could let him finish out the summer at the sawmill?

DAVID. Shucks, Sid! Don't waste no worry on him. They ain't money enough in the county to hire him to stay at a sawmill a week.

MATT. No, it's too much like work. If he wants a job let him go to them city folks that's a-puttin' in that dam out here. They'll take anything that comes along. An' he'd mix in fine with them furriners.

MEG. You know he ain't strong enough fer that sort o' work.

SID. This is your business, Paw, an' I reckon you can 'tend to it 'thout any help from me. But I wisht you could see your way to keep him awhile longer.

MATT. What fer?

SID. Well, I got some private affairs to look after.

MEG. An' you'd orter have a chance to rest up, too.

SID. Yeh, I *would* kinder like to spree around a little fer a change.

MATT. Well, if you want some time to yourself, I've stood Rufe two years. I reckon I can stand him another month. But I dunno what sort o' private affairs you've got to look after.

SID. If I told you they wouldn't be private. [*He glances at* DAVID *with a humorous twinkle.*] Fer one thing, I need time to think up some tales to tell about how I won the war.

DAVID. I reckon you've got enough thought up already.

SID. I admit I got the makin's o' some good-sized uns. But I want to try 'em out on you an' git 'em to runnin' slick afore I swear to 'em. [*He takes a large bottle from the pack and gives it to* DAVID.] Here, Gran'pap! Any time you git in a fight an' want to ketch t'other feller, jist take a swaller o' that.

MEG [*disapprovingly*]. What is it — licker?

SID. It's one breed of it. The French call it cone-yack.

DAVID [*sniffs the cork*]. It smells like it might be that.

MEG. Wus licker the best thing you could think of to bring your gran'pa?

DAVID [*laughing*]. She's afeard you're a-startin' me on my downward career, son. An' you may be. I knowed a man once that started when he wus about my age — an' he drunk hisself to death when he 'us a hundred an' two!

MEG. Well, jist the same, he might ha' thought o' sompen better to bring you. [*Looking through the things in the pack.*] Whar's the Bible I give you? Didn't you find room to fetch that?

SID. Somebody stole it.

MEG. Not your Bible?

SID. Yeh. They'll steal anything, in the army.

MEG. Why, I never hyeard o' sich a thing! An' you went through the whole war like a heathen, 'thout so much as a Testyment?

DAVID. The Baptis' preacher here said they 'us men over thar a-givin' 'em away to anybody 'at wanted 'em.

SID. Yeh, but they never got up whar we wus till after the fightin' 'us over. An' I didn't need one so bad then.

VOICE [*outside in the distance*]. Hello!

MEG. That's Andy 'ith the mail!

SID [*goes to the door and waves to him*]. H'lo, Andy!

ANDY. Well, I'll be derned! Is that you, Sid?

SID. A piece of me. Whyn't you come on in an' swop lies?

ANDY. I'm skeered you'll want too much boot, jedgin' by the size o' them they've been printin' about you.

SID. Don't let that worry you none.

[ANDY, *a healthy young fellow, comes in. His face is slightly flushed with whisky, but he is not drunk.*]

ANDY [*shakes hands cordially*]. You look healthy as a hell-cat!

SID. Yeh, I can still eat — an' drink some too when I can git it.

ANDY. Don't let not gittin' it bother you. That's all talk. I reckon you're derned glad you went over?

SID. I am now. But they 'us once er twice while I 'us thar I'd jist as soon ha' been back.

ANDY. You're lucky. They hain't been no time I wusn't sorry I didn't go.

SID. What 'us the trouble? Wouldn't they have you?

ANDY. Have me, hell! They'd ha' jumped at me! But Mam an' Paw wheedled me into claimin' edzemption so's I could help cut that patch o' timber up the river fer the gov'ment. An' now I'm totin' the mail.

SID. Well, don't be so down-hearted. Somebody's got to tote it.

ANDY. But, dam' it all, I want a job that gives me more elbow room! Every time I look at that piddlin' mail sack an' think o' what you've been through, I git so goddern mad at myself an' everybody else 'at I feel like startin' a war o' my own right here in the mountains!

[*While* ANDY *is talking,* RUFE *comes downstairs with a small bag in his hand. At* ANDY'S *suggestion of starting a war of his own he stops suddenly and stands as if rooted to the spot.* MEG *also moves uneasily and exchanges significant glances with* MATT *and* DAVID.]

DAVID. Why don't you? Rufe here says he's sp'ilin' fer a fight!

ANDY. Rufe! Good Lord! If he 'us in hell he wouldn't fight fire!

RUFE. Thank God, I'm not headed to'ard hell, like some folks!

ANDY. I know you claimed edzemption when you j'ined the church. Well, every man to his likin'. But hereafter I'm a-goin' to take what's comin' to me in this world *an'* the next! An' that 'minds me, afore I fergit it: have you got any forty-five ammynition in the store?

RUFE. Ax Matt. I ain't a-workin' here no longer.

ANDY. What's the matter? Lost your job?

SID. That's all fixed up, Rufe. I won't be workin' much fer a while an' Paw says you can stay another month.

MATT [*looks at* RUFE *questioningly*]. That is, if he wants to stay bad 'nough to tend to his business?

RUFE. They ain't no use axin' me if I want to stay. I got nowhere else to go. As fer 'tendin' to my business, I'll do what I've allus tried to do, render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's an' unto God the things that are God's!

SID. Then that's settled. I dunno whose department the ammynition belongs to. But go ahead an' git them caterdges fer Andy an' I'll come out an' beat you both shootin' 'ith this popgun here.

[*He takes a German pistol out of the pack.*]

ANDY [*looks at the pistol*]. You don't call that thing a gun, do you?

SID. No, it's a Dutch peace-pipe.

DAVID. I don't believe I ever seed any like that. How does it work?

SID [*hands him the pistol*]. It's automatic. You pull the trigger and it goes right on spittin' like a man chawin' terbacker.

DAVID [*passing the pistol on to* MATT]. Huh! I wouldn't be ketched dead in the woods with it.

SID. Why not?

DAVID. Because it's a insult to shootin'-men, that's why! It's built on the notion that you're a-goin' to miss all your fust shots!

ANDY. How'd you git aholt of it, Sid?

SID. I smoked a Dutchman outen it by provin' to him that I 'us a peacefuler man 'n he wus.

ANDY. Does it shoot any better 'n ourn?

SID. That's what I want to find out.

ANDY. Hell! Hain't you tried it yit?

SID. Not from the hind end. The feller I got it from missed me the first shot.

MEG [*eagerly, with a slight catch in her voice*]. Did he surrender, Sid — an' give it to you — after he'd shot at you?

SID. N — no, not edzactly. [*Quietly.*] But he didn't have no further use fer it, so I stuck it in my pocket an' fetched it along.

MEG [*with a sudden revulsion of feeling*]. Thou shalt not kill!

ANDY. Ner git killed if you can help it! [*He starts toward the door.*] Come on, Sid! We'll soon find out whether this thing hits whar you hold her er not!

MEG [*with intense emotion*]. No! Sid ain't a-goin'!

SID [*looks at her, puzzled*]. Why, Mam! What sort of a graveyard rabbit has crossed your path? Me an' Andy use' to have shootin' matches 'thout you makin' no fuss about it!

MEG. I don't keer! I've seed enough shootin' an' fightin' in my time! An' I've hyeard enough talk about war!

SID. 'Tain't a-goin' to do no harm fer us to shoot at a spot on a tree!

MEG. 'Tain't a-goin' to do no good! [*With a sudden flare of passion.*] An' I wisht you'd throw that pistol in the river! The man it belonged to had a mammy, too! Think how she feels — wherever she is!

ANDY. If he had been to as many shootin' matches as Sid, mebby you'd be the one that's a-feelin' that way!

RUFE. It wusn't the shootin' matches that saved Sid. It 'us the will o' God.

SID. Mebby so, Rufe. But I've noticed, other things bein' ekal, God generally sides 'ith the feller that shoots the straightest.

MEG. Oh! Cain't you talk o' nothin but shootin' an' killin'? I wish I could go some place where I'd never hear guns mentioned ag'in as long as I live!

RUFE. You can! We can all go thar if we live right. [*He hesitates and looks at* MATT *out of the corner of his eye.*] An' that 'minds me, boys: if I 'us you I wouldn't have no more shootin' matches. It 'us at a shootin' match that the feud fust started 'twixt your two gran'-daddies. [*In an instant the faces of the men become tense with amazement.* RUFE *is conscious of this, but continues with a show of innocence.*] An' they 'us both fetched home on stretchers, 'long 'ith lots more o' your kin on both sides, afore it 'us patched up. I know 'tain't none o' my business —

MATT [*his right fist trembling dangerously*]. Then why the hell don't you keep your mouth shut?

RUFE [*cowering in fear*]. I 'us only warnin' 'em fer their own good! They're frien'ly now an' I want 'em to stay that way!

MATT. You've got a dam' poor way o' showin' it! You know that's sompen we don't talk about here! If I didn't know you 'us a born fool I'd —

MEG. He meant everything fer the best, Matt!

MATT. That's what you allus say.

RUFE. All right, if you don't want me to do you a good turn, I won't. Hereafter they can shoot er do what they please, I won't open my mouth!

SID. You needn't pester your mind about me an' Andy, Rufe. We've knowed all about the war 'twixt our fam'lies sence we 'us knee-high. An' it's never made our trigger fingers itch none. Has it, Andy?

ANDY. Not a durned bit! We nachelly hain't talked about it, but I reckon we could if we had to.

SID. I don't reckon nothin' about it; I know it! Me an' you could talk about anything 'thout fightin'—'cept religion!

ANDY. Ha, ha, ha! I'd even take a crack at that with you, fer I expect we've got about the same sort!

SID. Well, my mouth ain't no prayer-book an' I don't try to make it sound like one.

ANDY. Me nother! You cain't make a sheep outen a wild cat by tyin' a bunch o' wool to its tail.

DAVID. You two young jackasses think you're mighty smart a-runnin' down religion! But I want to tell you sompen: I've lived in this ole world longer 'n both of you put together, an' they ain't nothin' to be ashamed of in bein' a Christian!

RUFE. I'm glad to know you feel that way about it!

DAVID. Hey! What's that you said?

ANDY [*slyly, with an amused twinkle*]. You hyeard what he said. He's a-hintin' that he didn't know, from the way you behaved, that you *wus* a Christian.

[DAVID *grips his stick and glares at* RUFE.]

DAVID. He won't *say* that, not to my face! If he does, dad-burn him, I'll show him whether I'm a Christian or not!

SID [*laughs*]. What'll you do, turn t'other cheek?

DAVID. I might—once! Consoun you, I b'lieve you agree with him! You an' Andy are so puffed up 'ith pride an' vind that you think nobody but women an' runts ever gits religion! But I'm here to tell you that I seed a preacher once right down thar in the Baptis' church that could pick you both up by the scruff o' the neck an' shake you down to your nachel size!

MATT. An' he didn't 'pologize fer havin' religion, nuther!

DAVID. No, sir-ee, not by a jugful! The fust day big meetin' started he picked out the wust sinner they wus in the congregation an' p'inted his finger at his nose an' told him right out in meetin' that he 'us a-goin' jist as straight to hell as if he 'us shot out of his own gun!

SID. An' d'you mean to say, Gran'-pap, that you set thar an' took it all 'thout a word?

DAVID. Who told you it 'us me?

SID [*laughing*]. Nobody, but I 'lowed it wus.

DAVID. Well, you 'lowed right! But I didn't set thar an' take it. No, I 'us jist as much of a jackass as you an' Andy. I riz up an' walked out on the platform where he 'us a-standin' an' sez to him, sez I, "You're a mighty big preacher! I can see that by lookin' at you. But what I want to find out is whether your religion's in proportion to your size!" An' 'ith that I hauled away 'ith the flat o' my hand an' smacked him like all possessed on the right cheek! [*He pauses dramatically.*]

ANDY. Well, wus his religion fool-proof?

DAVID. I'm a-comin' to that. I seed him grit his teeth an' trimble from top to toe jist like a steam engine in britches! But he ketched hisself in time an' turned t'other cheek!

[*He pauses again.*]

SID. An' what 'd you do then?

DAVID. I done jist what you er any other young jackass 'ld ha' done 'ith Satan aggin' him on: I smit him ag'in!

SID. Ha, ha, ha! I reckon he turned ag'in?

DAVID. I jedge not, fer when I come to they wust two men a-rubbin' me, an' he 'us a-goin' right on preachin' an' explainin' Scripture as cool as if nothin' had happened! He said the Saviour never told us what to do after we'd turned t'other cheek once, for he took it fer granted any durn fool 'ld know! [RUFE *shifts uneasily and starts to say something, but* DAVID *glares at him and he subsides.*] An' 'ith that fer a text he whirled in an' preached the best sermon I ever hyeard on the person o' Christ! He said the reason so many folks thought Christ 'us a weak an' womanish sort of a man 'us because they 'us runts theirselves an' wanted Him to keep 'em in countenance. Then he took

the Scripture, passage an' verse, an' proved jist the sort o' man Christ wus! Now I'll bet every one of you here thinks he used speritual power when he drove the thieves out o' the temple! [*He looks around at them triumphantly.*] But, 'ey ganny, he didn't!

RUFE. How do *you* know he didn't?

DAVID. B'cause he didn't have to, that's how! I never seed a man yit appeal fer speritual power when he could do it hisself!

RUFE. An' did he turn the water into wine the same way?

DAVID. No, that 'us a merricle. But if he'd ha' been a weak, water-drinkin' man it stands to reason he wouldn't ha' turned water into wine! You'd know that if you'd read your Bible the way you'd orter, 'stid nosin' aroun' in it fer the texts that suit you.

RUFE. I've read it from kiver to kiver! I know it back'ards.

DAVID. That's the only way you do know it! You'd have to have the right sort o' religion to read it for'ards!

RUFE. They's only one right sort! That's the sort Jesus had! An', thanks to Him, I got that!

DAVID. Shucks! Jesus wouldn't know your religion if he met it in the road! *He* didn't wait till the war broke out an' skeered Him afore He got His! He wa'n't that sort! I did have hopes that Sid might start preachin' the real Jesus religion when he got back, but's fur as I can make out he's like these here piddlin' 'Piscopalians that run that mission school over thar. He ain't got no sort at all! An' as fer the sort o' religion most folks has got around here, it's a stench in the nostrils o' God!

RUFE. You needn't look so straight at me! I know who you're a-hittin' at!

DAVID. I wusn't a-hittin' at nobody in pertickler! But I've allus hyeard you could tell who's hit by who hollers.

RUFE. I'm satisfied 'ith my religion!

DAVID. That's a shore sign God ain't.

MEG. La! I'd just as soon hear you talk about war as religion!

DAVID. It allus has been a peacefuler subjec'.

MEG. Cain't you think o' nothing else? David, I thought you said yo 'us a-goin' to rob a bee-gum fer Si afore supper!

DAVID. That's so! I'd 'most fergo I'll see if I can git 'nough fer him t mess up his mouth with. It's raine so much the past month the bees ain had no time to work. Matt, want t hold the smudge fer me?

MATT. Yeh. [*Rises and crosses to th outer door.*] Hold on! Some one els 'll have to help you, Paw. I bette round up that hay. Looks like a showe afore long. [*He goes out*

DAVID. Yeh, kinder feels like it. Com along, Meg; you can hold the smudg

MEG [*looks at* SID *and* ANDY *signif cantly*]. I'd orter be startin' supper. reckon Sid can help you.

DAVID. Sid! He ain't no hand 'it bees, an' you know it! Look here, Me if he covered hisself up from head t toe he wouldn't be as safe as he is rigl here 'ith Andy. So come on an' sto your frettin'!

[*He goes out through the kitchen, fo lowed by* MEG.]

ANDY [*getting ready to go*]. I recko I'd better be tappin' the sand. Si awhile ago you seemed to be worrie 'bout where you'd git your next drin

SID. I ain't losin' no sleep over it.

ANDY. Well, I got a bottle o' block ade out here in the mail pouch, if you-

RUFE [*eagerly*]. Where'd you git i Andy?

ANDY. That's my business.

RUFE. I've hyeard that new stu they're makin' now's so fiery that it burn your insides out. [*He loo around and lowers his voice confide tially.*] You ought to see some I go

ANDY. You! I thought you'd gor prohybition!

RUFE. This is some I had afore j'ined the church. It's over twenty ye old.

ANDY. Oh, hell!

RUFE. I swear it on a stack o' Bible

SID. If you had it afore you j'ined th church, how'd it ever live to be twen year old?

ANDY. That's what I'd like to knov

RUFE. Well, I allus did have a wea

stummick, you know that. An' it's been lots wuss the past few years. Any sort o' licker's apt to gag me!

ANDY. That don't count fer no twenty years!

RUFE. I ain't claimin' I had it in my possession all that time. D'ou mind that tale 'bout the revenue raid way back yonder, when Bob Fortenbury buried all his licker in the bed o' Buck Spring Creek an' never could find it 'cause it come a rain an' washed his marks away?

ANDY. Yeh?

RUFE. Well, me an' Bill Hedgpeth unkivered a ten-gallon keg one day 'bout three years ago when we 'us dynamitin' fish. [*Enthusiastically.*] An' it's the best stuff you ever struck your tongue into! So thick an' sirupy it clings to the sides o' the bottle jist like 'lasses!

ANDY [*interrupting him*]. Stop! Is they any left?

RUFE. Some. Why?

ANDY. Why! Ha, ha! Did you hear that, Sid? He wants to know why? 'Course you don't want to sell it?

RUFE. Well, my advice to everybody 's to let licker alone. But if folks is bound they're a-goin' to drink the stuff, I s'pose tain't no more 'n right to help em git sompen good.

ANDY [*slaps him on the back*]. Spoke ike a true Christian!

RUFE. That's what I try to be, Andy. An' ef that licker o' mine 'll help you ut I don't want to make nuthin' on it. The only thing is—I bought Bill Hedgeth's share, an' if I'm a-goin' to be out f a job soon I *would* kinder like to git ack jist what I paid fer it.

ANDY. Well, you won't have no rouble a-squarin' yourself if it tastes nything like you say.

RUFE. You don't have to take my ord for it. I got a sample bottle. [*He akes a move toward the stairs.*] Come n up an' try it!

ANDY [*hesitating*]. I've had about all can tote. But I reckon one more drink ke that won't load me down. [*As he rns to follow* RUFE *he hears a noise utside and looks off in the direction of the store.*] Oh, hell! Thar's Sis—out at the store!

SID. What's the trouble?

ANDY. Trouble! Jude's got religion sence you left—like Rufe! An' she has a jeeminy fit every time she smells licker on me! But drive on, Rufe! Dam' it all, I'm free, white, an' twenty-one!

[*He goes upstairs.* RUFE *hangs back.* SID *goes to the door and looks out.*]

RUFE [*insinuatingly*]. I meant fer you to sample it too, Sid!

SID [*intent on the door*]. Much obliged. You an' Andy go ahead. I'll go out an' see what Jude wants.

RUFE [*with venom behind the jest*]. I know what's the matter 'ith you! Now 'at you know Jude's got religion, you want her to think you're sproutin' wings!

SID [*surprised, turns and looks at him*]. Have you staked out any grounds fer objectin' to what she thinks about me?

RUFE. Why, Sid, you didn't take me serious, did you? She's all free country as fur as I'm concerned! I wus only jokin'!

SID. Oh, I see! Well, whichever way it is, you got some business o' your *own* upstairs an' you better go along an' 'tend to it—without me.

[RUFE *makes a move as if to reply, but changes his mind and goes upstairs, throwing a malignant glance over his shoulder at* SID. JUDE, *a handsome mountain girl, is seen approaching.* SID *smiles mischievously and steps back into the corner behind the door.* JUDE *enters and looks about her.*]

JUDE [*calls through the open door into the kitchen*]. Miz Hunt!

SID [*steps out, smiling*]. Ahem!

JUDE [*startled, looks at him in amazement*]. Sid! [*She takes a step toward him.* SID *presses his lips together firmly and assumes a pose of martyrdom.*] What's the matter? [*She comes nearer, eagerly.*] Cain't you talk? [SID *stands rigidly at attention and shakes his head solemnly.*] Oh! You hain't been shell-

shocked ner tetched in the head? [Sid *shakes his head again solemnly as before.*] Then why don't you say sompen? [*She takes hold of his arms, with increasing alarm.*] You know me, don't you? [Sid *seizes her suddenly and kisses her. After a moment she frees herself and looks at him again with amazement. He clicks his heels together and assumes his martyr's pose, but his mouth twitches with the ghost of a smile.*] Sid, if you don't tell me why you're actin' this way I'm a-goin' to scream!

Sid. I ain't actin'! This is nachel!

Jude. Nachel?

Sid. Yeh. Don't you mind the last time you seen me you told me never to speak to you ag'in as long as I lived?

Jude. Oh! So that's it!

Sid [*laughs guiltily*]. Yeh! You know I allus did try to please you!

Jude [*backs away from him angrily*]. If you didn't aim to speak to me, what'd you go an' kiss me fer?

Sid. You didn't say nothin' about not kissin' you.

Jude. I never kick afore I'm spurred! You knowed all the time I didn't mean it when I told you never to speak to me no more. An', anyhow, you could ha' writ!

Sid. I thought o' writin'. But I ain't much of a hand at settin' things down on paper. I 'lowed I could argy with you better when I got you where I could sorter surround you!

Jude. That's another thing! You'd ought to kep' your hands offen me! [*with a suggestion of coquetry.*] I still ain't a-goin' to marry you!

Sid. Oh! [*He turns away teasingly.*] Well, nobody axed you.

Jude [*her eyes blazing dangerously*]. You needn't throw that up to me!

Sid. Oh, come on, Jude, le's be sensible. [*He tries to take her hands.*] I'll quarrel with you an' court you all you want me to after we're married.

Jude. You act like you had a morgidge on me!

[*During the preceding two speeches* Andy *and* Rufe *are seen coming downstairs.* Andy *is in the state of exhilaration that precedes complete intoxication. At* Sid's *suggestion of marriage,* Rufe *halts on the stair and looks at him with a malignant expression.*]

Andy [*thickly, with a drunken flourish*]. Hello, Sis!

Jude. Andy! You're drunk ag'in!

Andy. What 're you a-goin' to do about it, little Sis? Pray? [*She hangs her head in shame and doesn't answer. He continues, belligerently.*] I'm free white, an' twenty-one! An' it's a free country! Come on, Rufe! [*To* Sid *confidentially.*] Me an' Rufe's got some tradin' to do! [*He winks elaborately.*] Ss-sh! [*He starts out,* Jude *makes a move to follow him.*] Wait! Stead! Where *you* goin'?

Jude. To the store. I got some trad to do, too!

Andy. Aw right. Then let Sid wa on you! Me an' Rufe 'll stay right he till you come back! Our business private!

Rufe [*eagerly*]. I expect you'd be ter let me go with her, Andy. I kno where the things are better 'n Sid.

Andy. No! I object! You stay rig dam' where you are! [*To* Jude.] No —go ahead! An', Sid, don't fergit t caterdges!

Sid. I reckon we'll have to call th shootin' match off, Andy. Mam's kic in' up sich a row about it.

Andy. Ha, ha, ha! She's afeard we start another war! All right, it's o But bring me a box o' caterdges jist t same as if it wusn't.

Sid [*in a lower tone to* Jude]. Co on! Don't cross him! [*Then to* Andy What sort o' caterdges, Andy?

Andy. The sort that raises the m hell.

Sid. Ha, ha! All right. But th don't tell me much. You can grow purty good crop o' hell 'ith any s if you'll water 'em 'ith enough lick

[*He and* Jude *go out fro*

Andy [*looks after him drunkenl* Does *he* think I'm drunk, too?

Rufe. I dunno what he thinks! [*sinuatingly.*] But did you hear w he 'us a-sayin' to Jude jist now?

ANDY. To Jude? [*He draws himself up stiffly.*] Wus it anything outen th' way?

RUFE. *I'd* think so. He wus a-talkin' bout marryin' her. [ANDY *relaxes, with an expression of boredom.*] But mebby you don't object to the Hunts an' Lowries a-swoppin' blood *that* way instid o' the way they use' to!

ANDY [*starts violently and lays his hand on his pistol*]. Swoppin' blood! Wus Sid a-talkin' about the Hunts an' Lowries a-swoppin' blood like they use' to?

RUFE. 'Tain't like you to be skeered of him, Andy!

ANDY. Umn? Wha's 'at? [*He lurches forward* RUFE *drunkenly and seizes him by the collar.*] Any man 'at says I'm afraid o' Sid Hunt's a God-dam' liar!

RUFE. I didn't say it! [ANDY *relaxes his grip and grunts interrogatively.* RUFE *continues, glancing suggestively in the direction that* SID *has gone.*] But I know the man that did.

ANDY. Umn? You know the man 'at did I— Who is he?

RUFE. I ain't tellin' no tales, but he don't live more 'n a thousand miles from here!

ANDY. Wus it Sid hisself?

RUFE. I ain't a-sayin' who it wus. But as your friend, Andy, I'm a-goin' to warn you o' one thing: don't you start nothin' 'ith Sid that you ain't prepared the end! Rickollect the last time the Hunts an' Lowries fit they 'us three more Lowries killed 'n they wus Hunts!

ANDY [*with the superhuman calm of the drunken man*]. Did Sid brag about it?

RUFE. I ain't a-sayin' what Sid done! I'm a-talkin' to you now as a friend fer your own good!

ANDY. Three more Lowries 'n Hunts! [*Weeping with rage.*] The God-dam' bastard! Where is he? Where is he? [*He starts outside.* RUFE *restrains him.*]

RUFE. Ca'm yourself, Andy! He'll be back here any minute!

ANDY. Rufe, are you fer me er ag'in' me?

RUFE. I'll stick by a friend, Andy, till Jedgment Day!

ANDY. Then gimme your hand! Fer jist as shore as sunrise I'm a-goin' to ekalize things!

RUFE. I'm sorry to hear you talk this way, Andy!

ANDY [*opens his pistol and examines it*]. You b'lieve in Provydence, don't you, Rufe?

RUFE. I don't believe nothin' about it. I know it!

ANDY. Look! [*He shows him the pistol.*] It's a-goin' to take six Hunts to make things ekal an' I got jist six caterdges left! That's Provydence!

RUFE [*not understanding him*]. My advice to you, Andy, is to drop this! The Hunts are dangerous folks! Sid in pertickler, now 'at he's been through the war! You'd a heap better pocket your pride an' live in peace with him if you can, fer if he gits started he won't stop at *nothin'!* I know him!

ANDY. But you don't know me, Rufe! You think I'm skeered! Well, jist wait! This is a free country an' everybody in it ought to be ekal! Three more Lowries 'n Hunts — that ain't ekal!

[*He breaks down and weeps with rage as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

The same scene, a few minutes later. ANDY *sits staring blankly at the door with an expression of tragic determination.* RUFE *goes to the window and looks eagerly in the direction of the store.*

ANDY [*sits up stiffly*]. Is he comin'?

RUFE [*comes over fearfully and lays his hand on* ANDY'S *shoulder*]. Andy, is they still evil in your heart in spite o' what I've said to you?

ANDY [*between a sob and a laugh*]. Ha! ha! Brother, let us pray! [*He clasps his hands over his pistol and prays in the fashion of a minister with a hymn-book.*] O Lord, look down on

this poor sinner an' make him love his enemies an' do good to 'em! [*He bursts into unholy laughter.*] Ha, ha, ha! I'll do good to him, all right!

RUFE. You ain't a-goin' to kill him now?

ANDY. Every man has to die when his time comes!

[SID *and* JUDE *are seen coming toward the house.* ANDY *watches them with the unnatural calm of the drunken man.* RUFE, *frightened, slinks away toward the kitchen door as they enter.*]

JUDE [*tactfully*]. Andy, I'm ready to go home now if you are.

ANDY. You know the way, an' the road's open!

JUDE. But I don't want to go by myself.

ANDY. I got some business to settle 'ith Sid!

JUDE. Well, I can wait for you. I want to see Miz Hunt, anyhow.

[*She goes into the kitchen.*]

SID. Here's your cateridges, Andy.

ANDY [*fumbles in his pocket for his purse*]. An' here's your money!

SID. That's all right. I charged 'em.

ANDY. 'Tain't all right! Not by a dam' sight!

SID [*humoring him*]. Well, Andy, jist as you say. [*He takes the money and gives him the cartridges.*] I'll scratch 'em off the book the next time I go out there.

ANDY. Rufe'll scratch 'em off! Don't fergit that, Rufe! [*He looks at* SID *with deadly calm.*] I don't want no Hunt — in hell ner out — to say 'at I killed him on a credit!

SID [*turns on him squarely, uncertain whether he is joking or not*]. The Hunts hain't never accused you o' not payin' your debts, Andy!

ANDY. They've had room to! I've owed 'em a passel o' lead ever sence I 'us born! An' I'm a-goin' to pay it now!

SID. What's the trouble with him Rufe? He seems to have sompen on his mind.

RUFE. I don't know! He's been a-talkin' plumb wild! I tried to ca' him, but I couldn't!

ANDY. You keep out o' this, Rufe [*To* SID, *with the same deadly calm*] Sid Hunt, this is a free country, ain it?

SID. That's what they call it, Andy

ANDY. If it's a free country, the everybody in it ought to be ekal!

SID. Well, ain't they? Some's ha more to drink'n others, but that's nothi to quarrel about.

ANDY. I admit it, but that ain't th p'int. When the Hunts an' Lowri fought the last time the Hunts kille three more Lowries 'n the Lowries kille Hunts! Do you call that ekal?

SID. That's all over now, Andy!

ANDY. But it ain't ekal — is it?

SID. Why, Andy, that happened s long ago — afore me an' you 'us born

ANDY. That ain't the p'int. It ain ekal!

SID. All right, then, it ain't. But wha do you want me to do to equali things?

ANDY. I don't want you to do a dam thing but holler! I'll do the ekalizin An' they's only one way! The Hun killed three more Lowries 'n the Lowri killed Hunts! I'm a-goin' to kill thre more Hunts 'n the Hunts killed Lov ries!

SID [*trying to appear calm*]. Thre more. That sounds reasonable enoug Now lemme see, how many Hunts ' that make in all?

ANDY. Only six! An' I got jist s caterdges in my pistol! That's prov dential!

SID. It does look like it. The on question is which six Hunts it's a-goi to be. [*Coaxingly.*] Now I'll tell yo Andy, I've got lots o' no-'count kin

ANDY. No! You cain't come that t me! I got no-'count kin, too! Th ain't worth killin'.

SID. I expect you're right about tha Andy.

ANDY. I know dam' well I'm right!

SID. Now look here, Andy, I want th thing done like it ought to be. [*Pe suasively.*] Now I'll tell you what I do. You go home an' study 'bo

this overnight an' come back to-morrow mornin'. If you still want to kill six of us then, I'll let you take your pick.

ANDY. Ha, ha! You think I'm a dam' fool, don't you? Well, I am; but I ain't that sort!

SID. All right, Andy, jist as you say! If you'd druther begin on what you got here now, I'll send fer 'em. Only, they ain't enough to make out your six. [*Significantly to* RUFE.] Rufe, step out thar an' tell Pap an' Gran'pap that Andy 'ld like to see 'em here on pertickler business.

ANDY. No! [*To* RUFE.] You grow to the place where you're a-standin'! [*Turns to* SID.] Don't neither of you move a peg ner bat a eye!

SID. All right, Andy. Whatever you say's gospel as fur as I'm concerned!

ANDY. I know dam' well it is! Rufe, git your banjer! [RUFE *obeys, taking the banjo from a peg on the wall.*] Can you pick "Turkey in the Straw"?

RUFE. I use' to could. But I hain't practiced no jig tunes lately.

ANDY. You're a-goin' to practice one now! Set down thar an' let 'er go! [RUFE *hesitates.*] Set down, I tell you. This ain't no time to stand up fer Jesus! [RUFE *seats himself and strikes the first note.* ANDY *turns on* SID *with an expression of maudlin determination.*] Sid Hunt, the Scripture says they's a time fer everything!

SID. That's right, Andy!

ANDY. I know dam' well it's right! [*He pauses to recall what he was going to say.*] When the Hunts an' Lowries fought the last time, the Hunts made my gran'daddy dance afore they shot him! [*He cocks his pistol.*] This is the time to dance!

SID. Well, you're the boss! Whatever you say goes 'ith me!

ANDY. Then cut your patchin'! [RUFE *strikes up "Turkey in the Straw" and* SID *starts to dance.* ANDY *follows him, keeping time with his pistol.* SID *moves gradually toward the outside door, but* ANDY *heads him off.*] Sash-i-ate! [SID *dances back toward the center of the room.* ANDY *follows him, calling the figures with increasing tempo.*] For'ard an' back! Corners turn an' sash-i-ate! Hit the floor! Swing an' circle! Ladies change an' gents the same! Right an' left! The shoo-fly swing! Sash-i-ate!

[SID *sashays toward the kitchen door.* ANDY *rushes after him.*]

RUFE [*seeing the muzzle of the pistol pointed in his direction, screams with terror*]. Oh! Don't —!

ANDY [*raises the pistol and covers* SID]. Wait! Swing your partner! [SID *turns and looks into the muzzle of the pistol.*] That's right! Face the music!

[SID *wipes the perspiration from his forehead, but gives no other sign of fear.* JUDE *appears from the kitchen.*]

JUDE. Andy! What are you —

ANDY. Git to hell out o' here if you don't want a bullet in you!

[JUDE *rushes forward with a piercing scream.* SID *springs under* ANDY'S *arm, thrusting it upward with a twist. The pistol falls to the floor.* SID *releases* ANDY *and seizes the pistol.*]

RUFE. Thank the Lord!

JUDE [*rushing between* ANDY *and* SID.] Don't kill him!

SID. I ain't a-goin' to.

ANDY. That's a lie — you air a-goin' to. Come on! You got me. Why don't you shoot?

SID. I dunno's killing you 'ld equalize things any, Andy.

JUDE. What's the matter with him, Sid?

[MEG *and* DAVID *enter hurriedly from the kitchen.*]

SID. You'll have to ax somebody 'at knows. He's a-setting out to kill as many more Hunts as the Hunts killed Lowries in a feud fifty years ago!

MEG [*with a shudder of horror*]. Oh! It's all beginnin' over ag'in!

DAVID. This is your work, Rufe!

SID. Now don't go packin' it on Rufe! He done all he could to ca'm Andy!

DAVID. Mebby so! [*He looks at* RUFE, *who stands with an expression of martyrdom.*] I b'lieve in givin' the

devil his dues! But he knowed Andy 'us a-drinkin' when he started that talk about the feud!

SID. My experience has been that a man don't take fire at a notion like that when he's drunk 'less he's been thinkin' some 'bout it when he's sober! [*He puts the pistol in his pocket and takes hold of* ANDY'S *arm.*] Come on, Andy! I'm a-goin' to put you on your horse now an' send you home, where you ought to be!

JUDE [*steps toward him with an apologetic air*]. I'll take keer of him, Sid!

SID. He's sober enough to go home by hisself. You stay here. I want to talk to you 'bout this.

[*He leads* ANDY *out.*]

MEG [*to* DAVID]. Go on out thar with 'em an' see 'at they don't start fightin' ag'in! [DAVID *follows them.* MEG *lifts her apron to her eyes and sobs despairingly.*] It's all a'startin' over jist like it did the first time! I'll never see another minute's peace now as long as I live!

JUDE. I never thought my brother 'ld act like that!

MEG. 'Tain't your fault! They cain't none of us help what our folks do! [*She goes into the kitchen, weeping.*]

RUFE. They ain't no use grievin' about it. I'd druther see everybody live together in peace. But fer all we know, this may ha' been so ordered. If it wus it 'll all work out fer the best in the end.

JUDE. How'd Andy ever git started quarrelin' 'ith Sid?

RUFE. Trouble don't generally start all on one side. But I'm a friend to both of 'em an' I'm a-goin' to keep my mouth shet.

JUDE. I know Sid wouldn't ha' crossed him a-purpose when he's a-drinkin'.

RUFE. Well, as I said afore, I ain't a-takin' sides neither way. But Sid can be mighty overbearin' when he's a mind to.

JUDE. What'd he say to Andy?

RUFE. Some folks don't have to say things; they can look 'em. [*He cuts his eye at her significantly.*] But you'll understand what I mean when you marry Sid.

JUDE. I hain't said yit I 'us a-goin' to marry him!

RUFE [*eagerly*]. You hain't said you wusn't?

JUDE [*with simple dignity*]. No; an' I dunno's I have any call to say it now. I don't know what's a-goin' to happen now!

RUFE. If you do marry him you'll find out lots o' things about him that you didn't know before. I know you think I'm a-sayin' this fer selfish reasons! But I ain't! Sence I first told you I loved you, Jude, I've learned to sing "less o' self an' more o' Thee" It's not my own good I'm after now but your good — only yourn! An' I tell you, Jude, ef you marry Sid I know you're a-goin' to rue it the longest day you live!

JUDE. Well, suppose you an' Sid found out you both knowed the same thing about me?

RUFE. The question is, which is right an' which is wrong.

JUDE. An' who's a-goin' to settle that?

RUFE. Him — up yonder!

JUDE. Do you think He bothers his head much about who's a-goin' to marry who?

RUFE. I know He does! I'll tell you why!

JUDE. I'd ruther not hear it now! I got too much else to think about — with killin' in the air!

RUFE. But I want to explain afore it's too late. I want you to know that my love fer you wus ordained from above. The first time I ever thought o' marryin' you, Jude, 'us when I seed you in church the day I got religion!

JUDE. Mebby you wouldn't h' thought of it then if you'd been a-studyin' 'bout your religion like you'd ought ha' been.

RUFE. I wus, Jude! That's jist the p'int! The whole thing 'us spiritual I mind it jist as well as if it 'us yistidy! Preachin' 'us over an' they 'us singin' "None but Christ." When they come to the verse,

"I sighed fer rest an' happiness,
I yearned fer them, not Thee;
But while I passed my Saviour by,
His love laid hold o' me,"

I looked across the aisle an' seen you
a-settin' thar a-singin'! An' sompen hot
swep' over me jist like fire! At first I
thought it 'us Satan a-temptin' me, an'
I tried to look t'other way. I don't
never look at the women's side in the
meetin'-house. Anybody at' knows me'll
tell you that. But I couldn't look no
other way then. Some power greater
an' stronger 'n me seemed to have
holt o' my neck, a-twistin' it around
toward you. I 'us absolutely helpless,
jist as helpless as a child! But I didn't
know what it was till they got to the
last verse. You know how it goes:

"The pleasures lost I sadly mourned,
But never wept for Thee,
Tell grace my sightless eyes received,
Thy love-li-ness to see."

It 'us then that the scales dropped from
my eyes! An' I seen the truth! An'
when I did, everything in the whole
world 'us changed fer me! I loved
everybody an' everything! An' I 'us so
happy I felt jist like I 'us a-floatin' away
in an ocean o' joy!

JUDE. If you felt like that you'd bet-
ter let well enough alone. I couldn't
make you no happier by marryin' you.

RUFE. Yes, you could, Jude. [*With mystical suggestion.*] The half has never been told!

JUDE. The half o' what?

RUFE [*looks at her significantly and chants*]

I've hyeard of a beautiful city,
Fur away in the Kingdom o' God;
I've hyeard how its walls are o' jasper,
How its streets are golden an' broad!
In the midst o' the street is life's river,
Clear as crystal an' pyor to behold.

[*Rolling his eyes mystically*]

Not half o' the joys that await 'em
To mortals has ever been told!
Not half o' the joys that await 'em
To mortals has ever been told!
Not half o' the joys that await 'em
To mortals has ever been told!"

You know how the rest of it goes!

JUDE. Yeh, but that's heaven. An' they ain't no marryin' ner givin' in marriage thar!

RUFE. Yes, they is, Jude! They's spiritual marriage! That's what I mean!

JUDE. No, that ain't the sort you're a-thinkin' about.

RUFE. You're wrong thar! That's the only sort I ever think about! I can say truthfully, Jude, that I've never had a thought about you ner no other woman that I'd be ashamed to tell to the angels in heaven!

SID [*enters at the front, laughing*]. Angels in heaven, eh?

JUDE. Sid! Did Andy git off home all right?

SID. Not yit. I left him out thar behind the store.

JUDE. Is he sick?

SID. Yeh—but he'll soon be over it. He was throwin' it off purty fast when I left.

JUDE. You didn't give him back his pistol, did you?

SID. No. They ain't nuthin' to worry about, Jude. He'll be all right when he's sober. Besides, Grandpap's out there with him. So I thought I'd come in an' have a little talk 'ith you; that is, if I ain't a-cuttin' short a preachment by Rufe. When I come in he was sayin' sompen 'bout angels in heaven.

JUDE. He says he can tell 'em all his thoughts about women. An' that's more 'n you can do, I expect!

SID. Ha, ha! Well, I hadn't thought about tryin' jist yit!

RUFE. 'Tain't nothin' to laugh about! A man hain't got no right to look at a woman, much less marry 'er, tell he can think right thoughts about her!

SID. How's he a-goin' to know what sort o' thoughts he can think about her tell he looks at her?

RUFE. All my thoughts about 'em are right thoughts. [*Maliciously, with his eyes on* JUDE.] But o' course I hain't

never seen them French gals you 'us a-tellin' about while ago.

JUDE. What 'us he a-sayin' about French gals?

RUFE. Don't ax *me*. I ain't a-carryin' no tales.

SID. You've said enough already. [*He makes a move toward him half angrily, then stops with a puzzled expression.*] I cain't quite make you out, Rufe. I dunno whether you're a trouble breeder or whether you're jist teched in the head with religion. But whichever it is, I want you to git this much straight: Me an' Jude's a-goin' to be married, an' anythin' I want her to know about them French gals I'll tell her myself.

JUDE. I've never said I 'us a-goin' to marry you!

SID. Well, if you've got any doubts on the subject I'll clear 'em up. [*He glances at* RUFE *significantly.*] as soon as I have a chance to talk to you by yourself!

RUFE. You needn't knock me down with it. I'm perfectly willin' to give you your chance with Jude. I guess she can jedge whether she could be happy yoked up to a unbeliever.

[*He puts on his hat and goes out stiffly.*]

SID [*laughing*]. Religion certainly does take a quair turn 'ith some folks!

JUDE. It don't seem to be a-troublin' you none. Sid, how'd Andy ever come to think o' shootin' you?

SID. You got me! He'd been mixin' his licker, I reckon.

JUDE. That don't 'count fer it! What 'd you mean while ago when you said a man didn't act like Andy when he's drunk 'less he's been studyin' some about it when he's sober?

SID. Jist what I said. He don't generally.

JUDE. Then you think Andy's been holdin' a grudge ag'in' you?

SID. I cain't account fer him flarin' up like he did no other way. Has he ever said anything to you about evenin' up the score between the Hunts an' Lowries? [*She starts and takes a step away from him with instinctive distrust.*] You needn't be afraid to tell me!

JUDE. I ain't afraid to tell nobody the truth! [*With suppressed emotion.*] It's a lie I'd be afraid to tell — er to act! [*She sees from his expression that he doesn't understand her.*] I b'lieve you know more about what started Andy's tantrum 'n you purtend to!

SID. Jude, you don't think I picked a fuss 'ith Andy!

JUDE. I dunno what I think! But I know Andy didn't bear no grudge ag'in' you!

SID. The chances are he wouldn't ha' told you if he had!

JUDE. An' I wouldn't tell *you* — if you did ask me!

SID. Why wouldn't you?

JUDE. 'Cause Andy's my brother! That's reason enough, ain't it?

SID. But I'm the man that's a-goin' to marry you!

JUDE. That's what you've been a-sayin'.

SID. Well, you are a-goin' ter marry me, ain't you?

JUDE. I wus mebbe — before. But now — I dunno.

SID. Now see here, Jude! If this trouble with Andy is a-standin' between us we might as well settle it right now.

JUDE [*with a flare of passion*]. You got no right to make me take sides ag'in' my own flesh an' blood!

SID. I ain't a-goin' to try to make you. That's sompen you'll have to decide fer yourself. The Bible says a man an' woman ought to leave their daddy an' mammy an' all the rest o' their kin an' stick together in spite o' the devil — at least, that's the sense of it. I don't purtend to pattern after Scripture like Rufe, but that part allus hit me a bein' jist about right. An' if you don't feel the same way, I want to know it now.

JUDE. But I —

[*She looks at him dumbly.*]

SID. They ain't no room fer "buts" here, Jude. If you've got any doubt about whose side you'd be on in a fight between me an' your folks, you'd better give yourself the benefit of 'em

JUDE. I couldn't never go back on my own kin!

SID. Then that's settled. [*He turns away.*] We don't belong together.

JUDE. You don't actially think our folks are a-goin' to start fightin' ag'in, do you, Sid?

SID. Not if I can keep 'em from it. But that ain't the p'int; if they do start, I don't want no weak sister fer a wife. If a woman ain't fur a man she's purty apt to be ag'in' him. They don't come a-settin' on the fence.

JUDE. You mean I got to — take sides ag'in' my own folks?

SID. I mean you've got to stand by me if you marry me.

[*She looks at him helplessly. He meets her gaze firmly, without flinching.*]

JUDE [*breaks down, sobbing*]. But it ain't right! You know it ain't right to go ag'in' my own blood!

SID. Well, nobody ain't a-makin' you marry me.

JUDE [*turns on him angrily*]. What do you keep on a-sayin' that fer when t ain't so! You know I cain't do nothin' else!

[*She sobs incoherently and puts her arms about him.*]

SID [*embracing her tenderly*]. I sorter hoped you couldn't, Jude. But I wanted you to find out fer yourself.

JUDE [*still sobbing*]. I'm a-goin' to do what's right, but it's terrible hard. Andy's my own brother! 'Tain't in human nacher to —

SID. Don't you worry about that! They ain't a-goin' to be no trouble. I jist wanted to find out whar you stood in case they wus. But you jist leave all that to me. Nothin' ain't a-goin' to happen to Andy ner nobody else.

[MATT *and* DAVID *are seen coming toward the front door.* SID *and* JUDE *separate.* JUDE *turns away toward the kitchen to hide her tears.*]

DAVID. Sid, me and Matt — [*Sees* JUDE *and hesitates.*] Step out here a minute, Sid.

SID. Is it about Andy?

DAVID. Yeh.

SID. Well, you can talk afore Jude. Me an' her's decided to git married.

DAVID. Well, I'm glad o' that!

MATT. Mebbe it'll help to keep the peace.

SID. It 'd orter. Go right ahead an' say what you're a-mind to. Jude knows all about the row with Andy, and they ain't no doubt where she stands.

DAVID. Well, Matt and me's been a-talkin' it over an' we think you'd better ride up an' ax Andy's daddy to come down here.

JUDE. What do you want 'ith Paw?

DAVID. We want to talk to him 'bout Andy.

SID. Whyn't you wait tell Andy's hisself ag'in an' let me an' him talk this over? I never knowed no good to come o' one o' these fam'ly talkin'-matches yit. Me an' Andy can patch things up if you'll jist let us alone.

DAVID. This ain't no time fer patchwork. I want to git Jim Lowry right here on the ground, face to face 'ith you an' Andy, an' tell him edzactly what happened afore the tale has a chance to grow. I've allus found him reasonable enough.

[RUFE *enters at the front.*]

RUFE. Jude, Andy said tell you he 'us ready to start home now an' to ax you if you 'us a-goin' with him.

JUDE [*to* DAVID]. Do you want him to wait tell you send fer Paw? If you do I'll tell him.

DAVID. That's my advice, but I don't want to be pig-headed about it.

SID. I don't, neither. Mebbe your way's the best. But if Andy's reached the state o' 'countability ag'in, I'd like to know how he stands on it afore we send fer his daddy. I know if I 'us Andy it 'ld jist make me mad.

JUDE. I'll talk to him an' see what he says. [*She goes out.*]

SID. How is he now, Rufe — sober enough to ride his horse home?

RUFE. Yeh, I reckon so. I never seed licker go to nobody's head like it did to hisn. When a man talks as wild

as he did while ago, I believe it 'ld be better fer everybody concerned — hisself included — to put him behind bars. If I 'us in your place I'd certainly have him bound by law to keep the peace.

DAVID. Folks that *can* be bound by law to keep the peace don't have to be. They're blood kin to them that looks around fer somebody to hold 'em when a fight starts. Andy belongs to t'other breed. [*Goes to window, turns to* MATT *and* SID.] They must ha' been a reg'lar toad-strangler up the river last night. She's a-b'ilin' like a kittle o' fish!

MATT. I noticed it 'us risin' purty sharp as me an' Sid crossed the bridge.

SID. 'Tain't out o' banks yit, is it?

DAVID. Nowhere 'cept in the low places. She soon will be, though, if she keeps on! I never seed the old sow a-gittin' her bristles up so fast!

RUFE. They'd be a camp-meetin' time if that big dam busted, an' they's one wing of it that ain't finished yit.

DAVID. You needn't lose no sleep over that. I 'us up thar t'other day, an' they ain't water enough this side of' Jordan to shake that wall. Nothin' short of a box o' dynamite 'ld ever make a dent on it.

RUFE. It wouldn't surprise me much if some o' the folks that fit so hard to keep 'em from puttin' it in tried blastin' to git it out. They's one of 'em that's been a-sendin' to town by me fer a mighty heap o' dynamite to dig wells with.

DAVID. In my opinion, Rufe, you've been usin' a good part o' that dynamite yourself.

RUFE. Me! I'd like to know what I'd be usin' it fer!

DAVID. To kill fish. I've seed you come back several times lately 'ith a fine string o' trout. An' I never noticed no hook marks in their mouths.

RUFE. I allus fish 'ith a tiny little pin-hook, to keep from tearin' their mouths! I'm thankful to say I can ketch 'em 'cordin' to law. I don't have to blast 'em out 'ith dynamite!

[*He goes out.*]

MATT [*glances in the direction that* ... *has gone*]. Somebody's been a-blasti 'em lately. I've seed lots o' little u a-floatin' downstream dead.

ANDY [*in the distance*]. I'm all rig — you don't need to help me.

[JUDE *is seen coming toward the do with him. He is much sobered, b still slightly unsteady on his le There is a moment of constrain silence as he enters and looks abo him.*]

SID. Here, Andy, have a cheer!

ANDY [*hangs his head shamefacedly*] No. Much obliged. I can stand a right. Jude said you axed her to mar you.

SID. Yeh, that's right, Andy.

ANDY. Well, I reckon they ain't n use in tellin' you that I made a fo o' myself while ago. You 'us all he an' seed it. But she wanted me to s it, and —

[*He stops, unable to find suitab words.*]

SID. Fergit it, Andy. That's what I' a-goin' to do. Somebody done son purty tall talkin', I admit. But I e pect it 'us the licker you drunk, inst o' you.

ANDY. I dunno 'bout that. But know it 'us me that drunk the licker!

DAVID. 'Tain't none o' my busines but if I found out they 'us truck couldn't put inside o' me 'thought addli my brains, I'll be derned if I wouldn keep it out er bust!

ANDY. I'm a-goin' to keep it out her after if I know myself!

SID. Then here's sompen you can tal home with you when you start.

[*He takes* ANDY'S *pistol out of h pocket and offers it to him.*]

ANDY [*starts to take it and stops*] No! I'll git it some other time!

SID [*puzzled*]. Why don't you wa to take it now?

ANDY. I dunno whether I'm sob enough yit!

SID. Ha, ha! If that's all 'at's worr in' you, I'll run the resk!

[*He drops the pistol in* ANDY'S *h ster.*]

JUDE [*nervously*]. We'd better be goin', Andy!

SID. Wait till I saddle a horse an' I'll go a piece with you. I want to see how it feels to have my feet in stirrups ag'in after walkin' all over the world.

DAVID [*who has been looking at the weather signs*]. I don't want to hurry nobody off, but from the way the clouds air a-b'ilin' over the mountain thar it wouldn't s'rprise me if we had fallin' weather ag'in afore night.

[MATT *goes out to look at the clouds.*]

SID. Well, I ain't skeered of a little water. [*He goes out.*]

DAVID. I ain't, nuther. But I'm like all Baptists; I abominate havin' it sprinkled on me.

JUDE [*looks into the kitchen, then turns to* DAVID]. Where'd Miz Hunt go?

DAVID. I expect she's out thar a-roundin' up her young turkeys. 'Bout half of 'em got draggled in the rain yistidy, an' they're droopin' an' dyin' like good children.

[JUDE *goes out through the kitchen.* DAVID *follows her.* ANDY *sits gloomily, his face in his hands.* RUFE *enters at the front and looks at him furtively.*]

RUFE [*comes forward*]. Well, Andy, I jist hyeard Matt say everythin' is all smoothed over an' they ain't a-goin' to be no more trouble.

ANDY [*grunts, without looking at him*]. Yeh, that's right.

RUFE. I certainly hope it is.

ANDY. I ain't a-goin' ter rake up the past, if Sid don't! An' I guess he won't, now that he's a-goin' to marry Jude.

RUFE [*starts*]. Oh, is he a-goin' ter marry her?

ANDY. Yeh, they got it all fixed up.

RUFE. That 'd orter help some. [*Then with a nervous laugh.*] I see you got your pistol back. [*Comes toward* ANDY, *lowering his voice guardedly.*] Andy, if I tell you sompen as a friend, will you swear on the Bible never to breathe it to a soul?

ANDY. My word's as good as my oath!

RUFE. I know it is! An' that's all I want!

ANDY. Then consider 'at you've got it!

RUFE [*comes still closer to him*]. You value your life, don't you, Andy?

ANDY. I reckon I do. I've had plenty o' chances to throw it away, an' I hain't took none of 'em yit.

RUFE. Well, you got another now! [*Significantly.*] If I 'us in your place I'd make myself as scarce as hen teeth around here!

ANDY. What are you drivin' at? Have they got a bullet salted fer me?

RUFE [*gives him an eloquent look*]. If they have they hain't told me!

ANDY. I don't want to know what they've told you! I want to know what you know?

RUFE. As man to man?

ANDY. Yeh, as man to man!

RUFE. I'm a-takin' a big chance to tell you! But you've allus been my friend, Andy! An' I'll stick by a friend tell Jedgment. They're all I got left in the world!

ANDY [*impatiently*]. Well, come on! What are they up to?

RUFE. Jist now — afore you come in —

ANDY. Yeh?

RUFE. Sid an' his daddy an' the ole rooster 'us a-holdin' a inquest over you!

ANDY. A inquest!

RUFE. That's what *I'd* call it!

ANDY. What 'us the verdick — death from nachel causes?

RUFE. They didn't edzackly say that.

ANDY. But you know what they meant?

RUFE. We never *know* nothin' in this world. But my advice to you is not to let Sid ketch you by yourself in a lonesome spot in the woods 'less you want to wear a wooden overcoat.

ANDY. If that's his game, why didn't he let daylight through me when he had a good excuse? [*Lays his hand on his pistol.*] An' what'd he gimme back my pistol fer?

RUFE. You don't know Sid like I do. He's deeper 'n he looks. If he'd ha' killed you while ago when he had a

chance, Jude 'ld never ha' married him. But he's made hisself solid 'ith her now by lettin' you off. He can afford to wait to put you to sleep tell they ain't nobody a-lookin', though that ain't a-pesterin' his mind much, fer he knows the law cain't tetch him.

ANDY. Why cain't it?

RUFE. 'Cause you threatened his life in the presence o' witnesses.

ANDY. Has he got all that figgered out aforehand?

RUFE. That an' more. [*He hears footsteps outside and glances toward the door.*] Here he comes now. You watch him! He'll be so smooth with you that butter won't melt in his mouth!

[SID *enters briskly.*]

SID. I'm ready, Andy, if you are. Where's Jude?

ANDY. I dunno! She went out thar to look fer your mammy!

SID. Jist set still. I'll call her. I hope your head ain't a-feelin' top heavy, fer I expect we're a-goin' to have to do some hard ridin' to keep ahead o' that cloud. It looks like it might rain tadpoles.

[*He goes out through the kitchen.*]

RUFE. Thar! What 'd I tell you!

ANDY. Well, I've done all I could! I admitted to 'im 'at I 'us wrong to breach that ole fight ag'in!

RUFE. I know you did, Andy. An' 'tain't a-goin' to do you no good to eat more dirt fer 'em 'less you're prepared to eat six feet of it. Fer I hyeard Sid tell his daddy that you wusn't the sort o' man as could be bound by his word to keep the peace.

ANDY. That's sompen I cain't understand, Rufe! If I had it in my heart to kill a man, I couldn't act toward him like I 'us his friend!

RUFE. Me nuther. I b'lieve in speakin' my mind an' lettin' whatever comes up come out. But you have to fight fire with fire; you cain't afford to take no chances when your life's at stake.

ANDY. What 'ld you do if you 'us in my place?

RUFE. I ain't a-sayin' what I *would* do, but I know one thing I *wouldn't:* I wouldn't wait fer him to git the dro on me! I'd be the early bird!

ANDY. No! I won't shoot first, 'les he starts it! But I'm a-goin' to kee my eyes glued on him, an' the firs suspicious move he makes [*he pats th handle of his pistol caressingly*] one o t'other of us'll be buzzards' meat!

RUFE [*insinuatingly*]. That's a right — if he don't take a crack at yo from the bushes!

[*It has grown suddenly darker. A gust of wind strikes the house, fol lowed by thunder and lightning* SID, JUDE, DAVID *and* MEG *enter fron kitchen.*]

SID. Andy, looks like it's a-tunin' u fer a reg'lar harrycane! What do yo say to havin' your horse put up an stayin' a while longer?

ANDY. No, I guess I'll be movin along.

SID. You might jist as well stay.

DAVID. Yeh, why not?

ANDY. I got to go!

SID. Andy, I hope you ain't got notion 'at they's any hard feelin's [*clap him on the shoulder*], 'cause they ain't

DAVID. 'Course not!

SID. Jude 'll stay. Won't you, Jude?

JUDE. I reckon I'd better. They won't expect me back in a storm. They won't expect Andy, neither.

ANDY. I've told you 'at I'm a-goin' storm er no storm!

SID. Well, you know your own busi ness. Ef you're sot on goin', let's git started. [*Starts out.*]

MEG [*stopping him*]. Sid, they ain't no need o' your goin'!

SID. Yes, they is. Whatever Andy's reason fer goin' is, I reckon I got a better one. I don't intend to waste no time a-gittin' things settled with Jude's paw. An' I couldn't ha' picked a bet ter time. If he makes any objection I'll have the ups on him while she's waterbound!

JUDE. I dunno's water 'ld help you keep me here ef I didn't want to stay!

SID [*laughs*]. Well, anyway, I'll tel your folks not to expect you tell you git thar. Are you ready, Andy?

ANDY. You bet your boots I am! I'm ready fer anything—hell er high water!

SID [*glances at the sky*]. It looks like we might have a little o' both afore long! [*Calls back.*] I'll be back fer supper if nothin' happens!

[*He goes out with* ANDY. MEG *follows them to the door and looks after them anxiously. Pause.*]

RUFE [*goes to the door and stands by* MEG]. I wouldn't worry! If any harm's a-goin' to come to 'em, worryin' won't stop it!

MEG. I wusn't thinkin' 'bout that so much as this everlastin' rain! I'd think it 'ld git out o' water some time an' stop! We hain't had three hours o' sunshine on a stretch in over a month!

DAVID. Well, I wouldn't lose heart jist because you've had a few turkeys drabbled! Think what a time old Noah's wife had a-roundin' up her menagery! [MEG *goes to the fireplace and begins fumbling with the kindling.*] What in the nation are you a-buildin' a fire fer? You ain't cold?

MEG. No, but the air feels damp. An' everything in the house molds so if I don't dry it out once an' a while!

DAVID. Then lemme start it fer you! [*He takes the kindling and proceeds to lay the fire.*] I never seed a woman yit that could build a fire 'thout gittin' it catawampused!

JUDE. I've noticed that all the things that men want to do are a man's job; an' them they don't, like washin' dishes an' milkin', are a woman's.

DAVID. Then how do you 'count fer it that when I tried milkin' fer you a long time ago the ole cow kicked so I couldn't? She seemed to know it wusn't a man's job!

MEG. She had room to kick. You pinched her teats to make her!

DAVID. Lord forgive you, Meg! How'd you ever come to think a thing like that?

MEG. I didn't think it. I hyeard you a-braggin' about it to Sid one day when you thought I wusn't a-listenin'.

DAVID. That's the trouble 'ith women these days: they've been a-listenin' to men's talk till they've got too smart fer comfort! If they keep on, I dunno how men are a-goin' to live 'ith the next generation of 'em!

JUDE. I dunno's I'd live 'ith one that pinched my cow to keep from milkin' her.

DAVID. Then you'd better warn Sid as soon as you marry him, fer it 'ld be jist like him to try it!

MEG. 'Course it would, now 'at you've put him up to it!

DAVID. Well, as long as the women tell the gals all they know, it's nothin' but right that men should give their kind the benefit o' their experience. If they didn't, the women 'ld soon be on top!

RUFE. I dunno's that 'ld be sich a calamity. If women had their way they'd be less fightin' an' drinkin' an' more folks a-workin' fer the comin' o' the Kingdom o' Heaven on earth!

MEG. At least they'd be fewer a-pinchin' pore dumb brutes to git out o' doin' any sort o' work. Men ain't perfect. I can think o' lots o' ways o' improvin' the breed.

DAVID. It's a quair thing to me that woman, ever sence the Lord made her out o' man's crookedest part, has allus considered it her main job to keep him straight!

MEG. If that's her main job, she's made a purty pore job of it!

DAVID. Well, a man's got to stay on top, somehow.

RUFE. Yeh! By hook er by crook!

DAVID. Edzactly! The strong uns do it by hook an' the weak uns by crook! That's the only difference! [*A shot is heard in the distance, followed almost instantly by a second. They all start and look at one another in alarm, as if afraid to put their fear in words.* DAVID *continues with pretended indifference.*] Wus that somebody a-shootin'?

MEG. Yes!

[*She rushes to the door and listens.*]

DAVID. Which way wus it?

MEG [*with a half-dazed expression, her eyes in the distance*]. Up the road!

DAVID. Oh, I reckon it's Andy a-lettin' off steam!

RUFE. Yeh, that must ha' been what it wus.

MEG. It couldn't ha' been Andy. He hain't got his pistol!

JUDE. Oh! [*She sinks into a chair.*]

MEG [*pityingly*]. Now they ain't no use in that, Jude! I know what you're thinkin'; but if Sid had wanted to harm Andy he'd ha' done it here while ago!

JUDE. That ain't what I'm skeered of!

MEG [*with sudden change of expression as the idea dawns on her*]. Did Sid give Andy back his pistol?

JUDE [*almost inaudibly, nodding her head*]. Yes!

MEG [*looks first at* JUDE *and then at* DAVID *with blazing eyes*]. What 'd he do it fer?

DAVID. Why, Meg, I b'lieve you're plum tarryfied! They ain't no sense in makin' things no wuss 'n they are!

[*A horse is heard approaching at a gallop.*]

MEG [*turns eagerly in the direction of the sound*]. What's that?

DAVID. It's Sid a-comin' back. I reckon he must ha' forgot sompen. It beats me the way you can make a bear outen a bush!

RUFE [*sympathetically*]. She cain't help her thoughts!

MEG [*who has stepped outside on the doorstep, utters a piercing cry*]. Oh, God!

[RUFE *runs to the door and looks out.* MEG *turns and staggers blindly into the house, her face covered with her apron.* DAVID *and* JUDE *catch her as she is about to sink to the floor.*]

DAVID. Dern it all, Meg, what's the matter with you? [*As they place her in a chair.*] I declare I never seed a growed-up woman as chicken-hearted as she is!

RUFE [*shakes his head ominously*]. That *does* look bad!

DAVID. What looks bad, you dad-burned fool!

RUFE. Nothin'—only that 'us Sid's horse 'ith the empty saddle that she seed a-turnin' in at the barn gate!

DAVID. Well, what if it wus?

RUFE. Nothin'! I jist don't like th looks of it! That's all!

DAVID. Well, I hope it's all from you

MEG [*rocks back and forth, sobbing*] They ain't no use in foolin' ourselve It's happened! He's dead! Andy' killed him!

DAVID. Now stop your ravin', Meg They's a thousand ways that hors might ha' got loose! It might ha threwed him!

[MATT *enters at the front, grim an determined.*]

MATT. No, it didn't! It's not a buck in' horse! You know that as well as do! An' I've never seed it skeer a nothin' sence I got it!

[*He takes the shotgun from the rac and starts out.*]

DAVID [*takes the rifle*]. Wait! I'm a-goin' with you an' see what's hap pened!

MEG. Matt! Don't take the guns! I Sid's dead, fightin' won't bring hin back!

MATT. I never said it would. If he' dead, my business is 'ith the man tha killed him!

RUFE. Vengeance is mine, saith th Lord! I will repay!

DAVID. He has to have a instrumen to work through! Even God cain' smite evildoers 'thout a fist!

[*He goes out with* MATT. MEG *sway back and forth despairingly.*]

MEG. If they is a God an' He's al mighty like they say, I cain't see why He don't stop things like this!

RUFE. Mebby He don't want to sto 'em!

MEG. Then He ain't a just God!

RUFE [*moves away from her instinc tively*]. I wouldn't say things like that Meg! All His jedgments are just an righteous altogether!

JUDE. Do you call it right fer Sid t go through the war an' then be struc down by Andy the minute he gits home'

RUFE. That ain't fer us to say [*Piously.*] He knows what Sid don while he 'us away in the war. We don't

JUDE. Andy ain't a God-fearin' man neither!

[*A vivid flash of lightning illumines the scene.*]

RUFE. I know he ain't. An' vengeance is on his track, too. It's writ that the heathen shall rage an' the wicked destroy one another. That's a part o' God's plan.

JUDE. That don't make it right!

RUFE. God don't have to jestify his ways to man. Let Him be right if you have to make out everybody else wrong's what I say, an' they's good Scripture fer it.

JUDE. They's Scripture fer everything! Job's wife told him to cuss God an' die!

[*A loud clap of thunder shakes the house. RUFE shrinks away toward the stairs.*]

RUFE. If you're a-goin' to talk blasphemy, 'ith a thundercloud a-comin' up, I'll have to leave you!

[*He goes halfway up the stairs and stops. MEG puts on her bonnet and throws a shawl about her shoulders.*]

JUDE. Are you a-goin' out?

MEG. Yes! I cain't set here!

[JUDE *prepares to follow her.*]

JUDE. I cain't neither. I'll go with you and see if they've found him. Ef Sid's dead, I'd kill the man 'at killed him — if it's my own brother!

MEG. That won't bring Sid back, but it 'ld leave the Hunts' hands clean. An' mebby it might keep the war from startin' ag'in. [*Hopelessly.*] But you won't do it. You'll find blood's thicker 'n water.

JUDE [*with resolution*]. I will — I'll kill him 'ith my own hands!

[*They go out together. RUFE creeps down the stairs in a state of intense excitement.*]

RUFE. It 'ld be awful if she killed her own brother! I couldn't marry a woman that had done that! [*He goes to the door and makes a move as if to call to* JUDE, *but stops.*] She won't do it. She couldn't. It wouldn't be nachel. They'll see him first, anyhow. O God! Don't let her commit a sin that she could never git fergiveness fer! [*The kitchen door opens and* SID *enters.* RUFE *recoils with a cry of terror.*] A-a-a-ah!

[SID *looks at him in amazement.*] Is that you, Sid?

SID. I sorter thought mebby it wus! What the hell's the matter with you? Are you havin' a fit?

RUFE. No, I'm all right! You come in kinder ghost-like an' I thought mebbe you might ha' been killed!

SID. You thought right. I might ha' been.

RUFE. What's happened to Andy?

SID. I dunno. Where's all the folks?

RUFE. I hain't seen 'em. I jist now come downstairs.

SID. They ain't all out o' the house in this storm?

RUFE. They must be out at the barn, lookin' arter the critters.

SID. Yeh, I reckon that's it.

RUFE. Sid, you didn't do nuthin' to rile Andy, did you?

SID. Not to my knowledge I didn't. My saddle geart wus loose an' I got off my horse to fix it. He seed me reach in my back pocket fer my knife, an' afore you could say scat he jerked out his pistol an' put a bullet through my hat!

RUFE. I shore am glad it 'us your hat, Sid, an' not you!

SID. Well, I ain't sorry, myself. [*He pokes his finger through the bullet hole in his hat.*] It's a good hat, but a air-hole er two won't hurt nothin' this sort o' weather.

RUFE. What 'd he do arter he shot at you?

SID. I didn't stay to see. When I found out he meant business I turned my horse loose an' cut fer the bushes. I'd like to know what's got into Andy.

RUFE. 'Tis quair the way he's actin'!

SID [*comes toward* RUFE *thoughtfully*]. What 'd he say to you up thar while ago when you give him that licker — afore it all started?

RUFE [*starts violently*]. Nothin'! He didn't say nothin', I tell you — not a word! [*Sid looks at him suspiciously. He flares up in a fit of anger.*] You needn't try to accuse me! I never put him up to it! [*Sobbing.*] O God! I wish I 'us dead! Every time anything goes wrong it's me! I'm to blame!

SID. I ain't accusin' you o' puttin' him up to it! What I want to know is how his mind got to runnin' so strong on that old war 'twixt the Hunts an' the Lowries!

RUFE. You hyeard what I said about it here! That's all I know!

SID. Then what are you a-gittin' so excited about?

RUFE. It's enough to excite anybody, to have a thing like that throwed up to him! An' you needn't ax me no more questions, fer I ain't a-goin' to answer 'em!

SID. All right! I'll ask Andy when I see him!

RUFE. If you do he'll only tell you a mess o' lies! You cain't believe him!

SID. Oh, so you're afraid he'll tell lies on you?

RUFE. Any man'll lie to save his own skin, ef you git 'im in a tight corner.

SID. Well, I'm a-goin' to ax him 'cause I'm curious to know jist what them lies air that you're afraid he's a-goin' to tell. [*Going to window.*] You say the folks is at the barn? They ain't no light thar. Did my hoss come back?

RUFE. I dunno!

SID. Have they gone after Andy?

RUFE. I told you I don't know!

SID [*glances at gun rack*]. The guns are gone! Jist what I thought!

[*Starts to rush out.*]

RUFE [*stopping him*]. Hold on, Sid; you cain't do nuthin' 'bout it now! They must ha' left afore you come in, and they'd natchelly go the short way and be halfway over the mountain by this time! It's too late to stop 'em now!

SID. By God, you don't want me to stop 'em. I believe you knowed all along where they wus, only you 'us afraid o' what Andy could tell.

RUFE. That's right! Blame it on me! I don't wish him no harm! I don't wish nobody no harm!

SID. Does that telephone wire along the river run from the dam to the settlement over thar?

RUFE. Why? Are you a-thinkin' o' phonin' from the dam to head off Matt an' your gran'daddy?

SID. That's my business. As I mind it, the phone's in that tool house on a ledge right down under the dam!

RUFE. You'd never git to that house now! You'd have to walk out to it on boards across that sluice o' water! It's dangerous when the river ain't up! You might jist as well commit suicide as try it now! I wouldn't do it to save my own brother, let alone a man 'at had tried to kill me! An' all you'll git out o' Andy is a passel o' lies about me! Natchelly he'll say I agged him on—

SID [*seizing him by the throat*]. An', damn you, I believe that's jist what you did do!

RUFE [*screams hysterically*]. No, I didn't, Sid! I swear to God I didn't! All I said wus that you 'us a dangerous man an' not to cross you! That if you got started—

SID [*tightening his grip*]. So! I'm right! You *wus* at the bottom of it. Did you do it apurpose?

RUFE. God forgive you, Sid, fer sich a thought!

SID. An' God damn you!

[*He hurls* RUFE *into a corner of the room and rushes out at the front. A blinding flash of lightning envelops him.* RUFE *lies on his elbow, cowering in fear, till the thunder crashes and reverberates. Then suddenly he rises to his knees and clasps his hands in prayer.*]

RUFE. Did you hear what he said, God? I can put up 'ith his insults to me, but when it comes to blasphemin' Thy holy name it does look like it's time to call a halt. But You know what You're a-doin', God, an' I don't. I'm only a ignerunt sinner. You know more in a minit 'n I could ever know in a million years. It bothers me, though, Lord, that You let the wicked prosper more 'n the righteous. They git the best o' everything in this world now. It wusn't so in Bible times, Lord. Then You cut the wicked down afore the congregation o' Israel. An' the dread o' You an' the fear o' You wus on all people. But now Your name is a byword among sinners. You hyeard that Yourself jist now.

[*His voice has been gradually increasing in volume till it culminates in an emotional climax. He rises and goes to the door, trembling in every limb.*]

I ain't presumin' to give You advice, Lord! You know Your own business. But if You'd make an edzample o' this blasphemer — if You'd strike him down in the abomination of his wickedness by a bolt o' lightnin', it 'ld serve as a warnin' to all like him. An' they'd be sich another revival o' ole-time religion in these mountains as You've never seed sence the earthquake.

[*He pauses again as if struck by a new thought. His knees gradually give way beneath him and he sinks to the floor.*]

In Your Holy Word, Lord, I know You commanded your servants to slay all blasphemers. Mebby You think that's enough. An' mebby it ought to be.

[*He pleads with great fervor.*]

But I'd druther You'd do it Yourself Lord. You can do it better 'n I can. An' it 'ld have more effect. But I want You to understand, God, that I ain't no coward. If it don't suit You to do it Yourself — I'll do it fer You — I don't keer if they hang me. You died fer me once, an' I'm willin' to die fer You if You want me to. They wus a time, Lord, when my proud heart said, "All o' self an' none o' Thee." Then You come a-knockin' at the door o' my sinful soul an' I whispered, "Some o' self an' some o' Thee." But that's all changed now, Lord. I'm Yourn an' You are mine. An' the burden o' my song now is, "None o' self an' all o' Thee." You can do with me what You please, Lord. If it's Your will that this blasphemer shall die, I've got a whole box o' dynamite out in the store, with a time fuse long enough so I can git back here afore it explodes. I can blow up the dam while he's under thar a-telephonin', an' the waters o' Your wrath'll sweep over him like they did over Pharaoh an' his hosts in olden times! An' the fear o' You an' the dread o' You'll be on all nations ag'in!

[*A heavy gust of wind strikes the house, followed by terrific thunder and lightning.* RUFE *rises to a standing position, his knees trembling. As the noise of the thunder dies away his fear is transformed into joy. He stands firmly on his feet and looks toward heaven, his voice ringing out triumphantly.*]

I hear You, Lord! An', like Joshua o' old, I go to do Your will!

[*He rushes out.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same scene, a quarter of an hour later. It is now totally dark outside. The only light within is a warm glow from the fireplace. The storm has settled into a steady downpour of rain. There are still occasional flashes of lightning mingled with the distant rumbling of thunder.

MATT *appears at the front door, driving* ANDY *before him at the point of a gun.* DAVID *follows them into the house, shaking the water from his hat at the door.* ANDY *seats himself, laughing defiantly in a mood of reckless despair.*

MATT [*glances about the room, then calls upstairs*]. H'llo! H'llo, Sid! [*Looks at* ANDY.] Hm!

DAVID. 'Parently they ain't *nobody* here.

MATT [*goes to the kitchen door and calls*]. Sid! H'llo! [*Comes back, his eyes on* ANDY.] Jist as I expected!

ANDY [*tauntingly, in a spirit of bravado*]. Well, I must ha' been a better shot 'n I thought I wus!

MATT [*with a growl of rage*]. Yeh, an' now 'at that p'int is settled —

[*He brings his gun to bear on* ANDY *significantly.*]

DAVID [*seizes the barrel of the gun and thrusts it upward*]. Hold on, Matt! I've seed more fightin' 'n you ever did.

An' we ain't a-goin' to start another row 'ith the Lowries lessen we have to. Sid might ha' come back, an' then set out ag'in arter us. We could ha' missed him easy enough if he 'us on hossback when we took that short cut across the mountain.

MATT [*reluctantly*]. All right! I'll see if his hoss is still at the barn.

[*He goes out through the kitchen.*]

DAVID. Andy, if I 'us as near hell as you air, I wouldn't try to hurry matters none.

ANDY [*chants derisively*]. If I git thar afore you do I'll tell 'em you're a-comin' too!

DAVID [*looks at him understandingly*]. Hmn!

[*He seats himself, his gun across his knees, ready for quick action.*]

ANDY [*gazes at* DAVID *defiantly till the silence begins to get on his nerves*]. Well, ole Rooster! Whyn't you say sompen? How's your whiskers?

DAVID. They're 'bout as common, Andy. How's everything 'ith you?

ANDY. Fine as a fiddle. I never felt better in my life.

DAVID. You're a-lookin' well.

ANDY. That's more 'n I can say fer you. [*Laughs.*] Do you know what you look like, a-settin' thar 'ith that ole lock, stock an' bar'l that you call a gun?

DAVID. I expect I look a right smart like Johnny-on-the-spot to some folks I could name.

ANDY. Not to me, you don't! You look edzackly like a crow sign in a watermillon patch! You ought to hire yourself out fer one! It 'ld give you sompen to do an' wouldn't skeer the crows none!

DAVID. I've skeered bigger game 'n crows in my time.

ANDY. You've never skeered me — if that's what you're a-drivin' at!

DAVID. You cain't fool me, Andy. A man don't work as hard as you're a-workin' now to prove he ain't skeered unless he is.

[RUFE *rushes up to the door, panting from exhaustion. He sees* DAVID *and stops suddenly in the doorway.*]

DAVID. You seem to be in a hurry, Rufe.

RUFE [*confused*]. Yeh — I — I wanted to git in out o' the rain. It's got so I have sore throat every time I git wet.

DAVID. Where's Meg an' Jude?

RUFE. They stepped up the road a little piece to see if they could find out anything about Sid.

DAVID. Then he didn't come back here?

RUFE [*hesitates, confusedly*]. Who — Sid? If he did I didn't see him! An' I've been out o' the house fer jist a minute. I jist stepped out to the spring an' back to see if the milk box 'us flooded. [*Eagerly.*] Didn't *you* see ner hear nothin' of him?

DAVID [*glances at* ANDY]. Nothin' we could count on.

RUFE. Well, he couldn't ha' come home 'thout me — [*He sees* ANDY *and starts guiltily.*] Oh! Air you here, Andy?

ANDY. Yeh, I'm here. I got a invitation I jist couldn't refuse.

RUFE [*tentatively, to* DAVID]. Couldn't Andy tell you nothin' 'bout Sid?

ANDY [*significantly*]. I could, Rufe, but didn't! All I told 'em wus that I shot at him, an' as fur as I could see I missed him. [RUFE *breathes more easily.* ANDY *continues in the same spirit of bravado, glancing at* DAVID.] But they wouldn't ha' been no doubt about it if I hadn't drunk so much pop-skull that my hand 'us shaky!

RUFE. You ought to thank the Lord you didn't hit him, Andy!

ANDY. No! If I didn't hit him it 'us the licker saved him this time, not the Lord!

[MATT *enters through the kitchen door, carrying a lighted lantern.* RUFE *shrinks back into the corner near the bed.*]

MATT. He ain't at the barn, an' the hoss is in the stall! Does that satisfy you?

[*He makes a menacing move toward* ANDY.]

DAVID [*stopping him*]. Not edzackly.

Arter all, Sid might ha' been crippled so he couldn't git home. Afore you start shootin' you'd better take the lantern an' search that patch o' woods. I'll 'tend to Andy.

MATT. In that case we'd orter tie him up. If you ever take your eyes offen him it 'ld be jist like him to snatch that ole gun an' blow your brains out.

DAVID. I'll take my chance o' that. But we can tie him if it'll ease your mind any. I'll git a hame-string.

[*He goes into the kitchen. There is a brief silence.* MATT *places the lantern on the floor, keeping his eyes on* ANDY *and his gun ready.*]

RUFE [*to break the silence*]. I certainly do hope 'at nothin' ain't happened to Sid!

[*A loud explosion is heard in the distance.* RUFE *starts with an expression of intense excitement.*]

MATT. What the devil wus that?

RUFE [*slinks toward the door*]. It must ha' been thunder! That's all it wus! It couldn't ha' been nothin' else!

[*He slips out and is seen rushing away past the window.*]

MATT [*as if to himself*]. Sounded to me like blastin'.

ANDY. Mebby it 'us the stopper blowed out o' hell!

MATT. You'll be able to tell more about that a little later when you git thar!

[*He glares at* ANDY *menacingly.* JUDE *enters from the kitchen, followed by* MEG *with a lantern, which she places on the table.*]

ANDY. Well, Sis, have you come fer the funeral?

[*She turns away from him to conceal her emotion.*]

MATT [*to* MEG]. You didn't see ner hear nothin' o' Sid?

MEG. No! What happened to him?

MATT. That's what I'm a-tryin' to find out.

MEG [*looks at* ANDY]. Don't *he* know?

MATT. 'Course he knows, but he ain't a-goin' to tell us tell he has to!

[MEG *looks at* ANDY *with an expression of dumb hopelessness. He avoids her eyes.*]

JUDE [*comes between* MATT *and* ANDY *in a burst of rage*]. Why don't you tell what you done with him?

ANDY. Why don't a mewly cow have horns?

MEG [*despairingly to* MATT]. Couldn't you git nothin' out of him?

MATT. Nothin' but a passel o' words!

ANDY [*apologetically, his eyes on* MEG]. I told you I shot at him an' missed him!

JUDE. If you missed him, whar is he? Why don't he come home? [*He looks at her enigmatically and whistles a jig. She flies into a rage.*] Stop that an' answer me er I'll —

[*She seizes* MATT'S *gun as if to take it from him.*]

ANDY. Aw right, Sis, blaze away! But I'd ruther you'd let Matt do it. He's a better shot'n you are. [*She releases the gun.*] As fer Sid — at the rate he 'us a-goin', the last time I seen him he'd ought to be in Chiny by now, if he hain't run hisself to death.

MATT. That's a lie on the face of it!

ANDY. Well then, I killed him an' buried him in the sand. How's that fer the truth?

[MEG *and* JUDE *turn away with a gesture of revulsion.*]

MATT. You'd be closer to it, in my opinion, if you said you killed him an' throwed him over the cliff into the river!

ANDY. That *would* ha' been less trouble 'n buryin' him if I'd ha' hit him.

MATT [*sarcastically*]. You missed him apurpose, I reckon!

ANDY. No, Matt! Don't git no wrong notions about me! I missed him because I couldn't hit him!

MATT. It's jist as well you ain't axin' fer mercy, fer all you're a-goin' to git is jestice — an' plenty of it!

ANDY. You don't have to tell me that. I know you're a-goin' to send me to hell the short way. But I don't want you to make no mistake about one thing: when I go I'll go a-standin' up on my hind legs. I won't go a-crawlin' ner

a-whinin' fer mercy. [*Glancing at* MEG *and* JUDE *again.*] To the best o' my knowledge an' belief, I didn't kill Sid. That's the truth. [*He turns to* MATT *belligerently.*] But I tried my damnedest to kill him! An' that's the truth, too!

JUDE [*accusingly*]. What 'd you have ag'in' him?

ANDY [*enigmatically, after a brief silence*]. He turned his toes out too fur when he walked.

[MEG *and* JUDE *turn away angrily.*]

MATT [*restraining himself with difficulty*]. Is that the best reason you can think of?

ANDY. It's good enough, ain't it?

MATT [*brings the gun to bear on him*]. What do you want us to tell your folks?

ANDY. Jist say I got drunk an' turned my toes *up* too fur!

DAVID [*enters with the hame-strings and hands one to* MATT]. Here! You tie his feet. [MATT *lays his gun down and begins tying* ANDY'S *feet to the chair.*] I'll 'tend to his arms. [*Stretching one of the hame-strings out as he seizes* ANDY'S *arms.*] I reckon these air long enough.

MATT. You've been long enough a-gittin' 'em.

ANDY. Yeh. A little more an' Matt 'ld ha' fixed things so's you wouldn't ha' needed 'em.

MATT. It wouldn't ha' been no mistake, nuther. If he didn't kill Sid, he tried to!

ANDY. Yeh, I told you it wusn't my fault I didn't.

[MATT, *who has finished tying him, grabs his gun with a growl of rage.*]

DAVID [*cuffs* ANDY]. Keep your mouth shet! [*To* MATT.] Go on! They'll be plenty o' time to settle 'ith him when you git back!

[MATT *takes the lantern and goes out, closing the door. There is a brief pause. The roar of rushing water is vaguely perceptible in the distance.*]

JUDE [*listens*]. D' you hear that?

DAVID [*with a puzzled expression*]. Yeh. It must be another cloud a'comin' up.

JUDE. I never hyeard a cloud roar like that.

DAVID. 'Tis quair. Sounds like wind er hail.

MEG. It don't sound like that to me. I dunno what it is.

[RUFE *is seen rushing past the window. He flings the door open and stands with his hand above his head, pointing toward heaven, his eyes rolling in a fine frenzy of excitement.*]

RUFE. It's come! It's come!

DAVID. What's come?

RUFE. The day o' His Wrath — when the saints an' the sinners shall be parted right an' left! [*He shakes his finger at* ANDY.] Brother, will you be able to stan' on that day? That's the question every man here's got to answer — an' every woman, too!

DAVID. You speak as one havin' authority, Rufe.

RUFE. I speak what I know!

DAVID. Have you been up to heaven to git the latest news?

RUFE. No, I hain't been to heaven yit! But I've been about my Master's business!

DAVID. Well, I hope fer His sake that you 'tended to it better 'n you do to ourn.

RUFE. I know I done what He told me! That's all I know — an' all I want to know — on this earth!

MEG [*despairingly*]. I reckon that's enough fer any of us. But I *would* like to know what happened to Sid. I don't feel that I can ever close my eyes in sleep er death tell I find out.

RUFE [*starts violently*]. If he's in that patch o' woods where Andy left him, it's too late to find him! The river's all over everything! Look!

[*He opens the door and points toward it.*]

MEG. Oh! Is that what's a-makin' the noise?

RUFE. Yeh, it's a-sweepin' everything afore it!

[MEG, DAVID, *and* JUDE *go outside and stand gazing in wonder at the flood.*]

ANDY [*calls excitedly, under his breath*]. Rufe! Come here! [RUFE *turns and looks at him.*] Quick! Take my knife — it's in my right-hand pocket — an' cut these things! [RUFE *moves toward the door, pretending not to hear.*] Did you hear what I said?

RUFE. Yeh, I hyeard you, Andy.

ANDY. Then hurry up!

RUFE. They'd know I done it, Andy!

ANDY. No, they won't! I'll take keer o' you! I've stuck by you so fur an' hain't told 'em nothin'! An' this may be your only chance to help me. If the river's over that patch o' woods Matt'll be back here in a minute. Come on! We can go down the cellar stairs an' git out! They won't be watchin' fer us thar! The outside cellar door ain't locked, is it?

RUFE. I dunno, Andy! But Matt 'ild he shore to ketch me! I'll do anything in my power, Andy! [*Starts to kneel.*] I'll pray fer you!

ANDY [*shouts recklessly, unable to conceal his contempt*]. No! You needn't do no prayin' fer me! But they's one little turn you can do!

RUFE [*eagerly*]. All right, Andy! I'll do anything you say!

ANDY. Then step down to hell an' tell the devil to have the place good an' hot afore *we* git thar! Fer you're a-goin' with me!

RUFE [*alarmed by* ANDY'S *manner*]. You ain't a-goin' to tell 'em what I told you?

ANDY. I'm a-goin' to tell 'em all I know — an' a little bit more — if you don't turn me loose dam' quick!

RUFE. But you put yourself on oath, Andy!

ANDY. It's a poor fool 'at can put hisself on oath an' cain't take hisself off!

RUFE. Andy, don't say thinks like that! You may not have much longer to live! An' if you break your oath an' tell 'em, you'll lose all chance o' gittin' to heaven!

ANDY. Heaven be damned! I ain't like you, Rufe! We're both a-goin' to hell, but I'm a-goin' thar by choice!

[MATT *enters through the kitchen with the lantern and puts his gun in the rack.* MEG, JUDE, *and* DAVID, *seeing him, return from the porch.*]

MEG. Couldn't you go no further?

MATT. No, they's been a cloud bust up the river. A wall o' water swep' down past me ten foot high. I jist managed to git out o' the way, when it struck the foot o' the cliffs an' shook 'em like a earthquake.

[*He starts toward the kitchen door.*]

MEG. Whar 're you a-goin' now?

MATT. Out to the barn to pen up the cattle afore they git washed away.

[*He goes out.*]

JUDE [*sobbing*]. Oh! It jist seems like I cain't never stand it to set here — an' the river a-coverin' up everything out thar!

DAVID. Don't fret 'bout the river! The wust it ever does is to come high enough to flood the cellar a little. We're allus safe here.

JUDE. 'Tain't us I'm a-thinkin' about!

RUFE. It certainly is a quair time — everything a-comin' at once!

ANDY. Yeh, it's Jedgment Day!

[*He sings mockingly, his eyes on* RUFE.]

Are you ready, are you ready fer the comin' o' the Lord?
Are you livin' as he bids you in His Word — in His Word?
Are you walkin' in the light? Is your hope o' heaven bright?
Could you welcome Him to-night? Not by a dam' sight!

RUFE. Andy, I want you to stop that sort o' thing!

ANDY. Oh! I 'us afeard I 'us a-trampin' on your toes!

RUFE. If it 'us jist mine you 'us a-trampin' on I wouldn't say a word! But it ain't! It's His — up yonder!

ANDY. Ha! ha! I didn't know you 'us a-standin' in His shoes, Rufe!

RUFE. You'd a heap better 'umble your proud heart an' quit mockin' an' revilin', Andy! The Good Book says that them that reviles God's handiwork shall die! [*With a convulsive gesture.*] An' they shall, too!

ANDY. Yeh, when their time comes—like you an' me an' everybody else.

RUFE [*in a sort of prophetic ecstasy*]. That time has come! This is the beginnin' of a new world! To-morrow 'll be the dawn of a new day!

ANDY. It allus has been!

MEG. [*provoked beyond endurance*]. That ain't what he means, an' you know it!

RUFE. Have patience with him, Meg. We may snatch him like a brand from the burnin' yit. On that day, Andy, the wicked'll be scattered like chaff afore a mighty wind, an' there'll be weepin' an' gnashin' o' teeth! Selah!

ANDY. Toot! Toot! Hurrah fer hell!

MEG. You blasphemer! David, why don't you make him shet his mouth?

DAVID. I know the lad too well to think I could break his sperit short o' killin' him. An' I ain't a-goin' to do that tell I find out fer shore, no matter how hard he tries to make me. [*He seats himself in the armchair, his gun across his knee.*] Arter all, Meg, the Lord's will's too big a thing fer any one man to git a strangle hold on it. Rufe's dead certain that God allus sees eye to eye 'ith him on every question. Fer all we know, God hisself may consider *that* more blasphemous 'n what Andy's a-doin'.

RUFE [*his face distorted with malignant rage, shakes his finger at* DAVID]. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsady! Fer—

DAVID [*springs up menacingly*]. Woe unto you if you don't quit bawlin' Scripture in my years! [RUFE *recoils, taking refuge behind* MEG. DAVID *seats himself again.*] You don't know what you're a-talkin' about, nohow! If your brains 'us turned to dynamite, they wouldn't be enough of 'em to blow the hat offen your head! [*To* ANDY, *with a puzzled expression.*] Sompen outen the ordinary's happened to him!

ANDY [*his eyes on* RUFE]. Yeh, an' he don't seem to want to tell about it!

MEG. If you'd ever experienced real religion yourselves, you'd know what's the matter with him!

DAVID. Humph! What makes you think what he's got's real religion?

MEG. By their fruits ye shall know 'em. When I mourned fer Sid you an' Matt didn't bring me no comfort. All you thought of wus vengeance. But I feel comforted some now [*she pats* RUFE'S *hand protectingly*] an' Rufe done it.

DAVID. Shucks! If comfort in time o' trouble 'us religion, most folks could git more of it outen a bottle o' licker 'n they could outen the Bible!

[*He looks straight at* RUFE *as he says this.*]

RUFE [*angrily*]. Are you accusin' me o' bein' loaded?

DAVID. Right up to the gills, Rufe. You're drunk on sompen. I dunno whether it's licker er religion.

ANDY. What difference does it make? One's jist as dangerous as t'other when it gits into a cracked head.

JUDE. The time 'll come, Andy, when you'll wish you'd prayed 'stid o' scoffin'!

MEG. Yeh, you'll be beggin' Rufe yit fer a drop o' water to cool your tongue in Torment!

RUFE. Let 'em revile me! I don't keer! Let 'em persecute me, lie about me, crucify me! I don't keer what they do! Fer verily I say unto you it'll be better fer Sodom an' Gomorrow on the day o' Jedgment than fer them! [*He looks at* ANDY *and* DAVID *significantly.*] An' that day ain't as fur off as it has been! If I 'us a mind to I could tell you things that 'ld curdle your blood an' dry up the marrer in your bones!

MEG [*credulously*]. Have you seen a vision, Rufe?

RUFE [*rolls his eyes mystically toward* ANDY]. What I've seen I've seen! He that hath years to hear let him hear! [*He pauses and gazes about him impressively in the fashion of one "possessed of the Spirit."*] An', lo, there wus a great earthquake! An' the sun become black as sackcloth o' hair an' the moon become as blood! An' the stars o' heaven fell into the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs when she is a-shaken of a mighty

wind! An' the heavens parted as a scroll when it is rolled together! An' every mountain an' island were moved out o' their places! An' the kings o' the earth, an' the great men, an' the rich men, an' the chief captains, an' the mighty men hid theirselves in the dens an' in the rocks o' the mountains; an' said to the rocks an' the mountains, fall on us an' hide us from the face o' Him— [*He has gradually worked himself up to an emotional singsong like that of the old-fashioned mountain preacher.* MEG *and* JUDE *have been swaying rhythmically in tune with his voice. They now join in shouting* "Halleluyah!" "Amen!" "Blessed be His Name!" *etc. Inspired by this, he continues with increasing fervor, losing all control of himself*] — that sitteth on the throne — ah! An' from the wrath o' the Lamb — ah! Fer the gr-r-r-eat day o' His wrath has come — ah — !

ANDY. Whoa, ole hoss, er you'll bust your bellyband! When I tell my religious experience I won't have to stop to suck wind! I'll spit it out quick!

RUFE [*shakes his finger at* ANDY *impressively*]. If you'd seen what I've seen an' hyeard what I've hyeard your tongue 'ld cleave to the roof o' your mouth! Woe unto the covenant breaker, fer—

ANDY. No, Rufe! You cain't come that on me! Oath er no oath, my tongue won't cleave wuth a dam! It's loose at both ends an' it's a-gittin looser every minute! If you don't spill the truth, I'm a-goin' to! An' that mighty—

RUFE [*frantically, to* MEG *and* JUDE]. Don't listen to him! His mouth is foul 'ith blasphemy!

ANDY. Bretherin an' sisterin, listen! —

RUFE [*begins to sing and drowns* ANDY'S *voice*].

"I am bound fer the Promised Land!

[*He swings his arms camp-meeting fashion. The women join in and sing with great fervor.*]

I am bound fer the promised land!
Oh, who will come an' go with me?
I am bound fer the Promised Land!"

ANDY [*with mingled admiration and contempt*]. I dunno what the devil'll do 'ith you, Rufe! One thing's certain, they ain't no place in hell hot enough fer you!

MEG. David, I've stood all that I'm a-goin' to! If you won't do nothin' about it, I will!

DAVID [*rising*]. Well, what do you want me to do?

MEG. I don't keer — jist so you git him out o' my sight!

RUFE. Whyn't you put him in the cellar?

[*He catches* ANDY'S *eye and gives him a significant look.* ANDY, *who is about to speak, interprets this to mean that* RUFE *has decided to help him escape, and remains silent.*]

MEG. We can. That's more like the place whar he'd ought ha' been put in the first place.

DAVID [*starts untying* ANDY]. All right, Meg, I'll 'tend to him. But you'd better git me the key to the outside door, so I can lock him in, case he breaks loose.

[*She goes into the kitchen.*]

ANDY [*looks at* RUFE *significantly*]. Well, Rufe, in partin' lemme wish you a long life [*menacingly*] an' plenty o' time to save yourself from the hell fire you're so skeered of.

RUFE [*with a look of understanding*]. Don't you worry about that, Andy. I'll pray fer you — an' do anything else I can. [MEG *returns from the kitchen.*]

DAVID. Did you git that key?

MEG. Yeh, here 'tis. [*Vindictively to* ANDY.] An' I hope you lock him in tight!

ANDY [*sings as* DAVID *starts toward the cellar with him*].

Wonderful love! Oh, wonderful love!
I'll sing of its fullness forever!
I've found the way that leadeth above!
It's the way down into the cellar!

[*He disappears into the cellar with* DAVID. MEG *goes ahead of them with the lantern and lights the way.* DAVID *closes the door behind him.*]

MEG [*in the cellar*]. Lord! The water's risin' in here! That ain't from the river?

DAVID. No, I reckon it's jist a wet-weather spring!

[RUFE *goes to the door and looks out. He is evidently pleased by what he sees.* JUDE, *puzzled by his manner, goes to the door and turns back, startled and alarmed.*]

JUDE. Look! The river! Did you see it?

RUFE. Yeh, I seed it!

JUDE. It's 'most up to the porch steps!

RUFE. Well, 'taint nothin' to git excited about. We're safe. An' Andy's all right, too. It 'ld have to come lots higher afore it could harm him.

[*The outside cellar door is heard to slam.* JUDE *steps out on the porch and looks in the direction of the noise.*]

JUDE [*calls*]. Whar you a-goin', Meg — out to the barn?

MEG. Yeh.

JUDE. Wait a minute an' I'll help you.

DAVID. No, Jude, you stay under shelter!

[JUDE *stands on the porch, gazing out into the darkness.* RUFE *glances at her, then goes over to the cellar door and opens it cautiously, keeping an eye on* JUDE.]

RUFE [*calls softly*]. Andy! Is the water comin' in?

ANDY [*guardedly, from the cellar*]. Yeh, it's jist startin'. You'd better hurry an' turn me loose afore they git back!

RUFE. I cain't right now. I think I hear Matt comin'. Don't worry 'bout drowndin'. It's jist a little rain water a-seepin' in.

ANDY [*roars angrily*]. That's a lie, you son of a sheep-killin' bitch!

[RUFE *slams the door to quickly and looks at* JUDE *to see if she has heard.*]

JUDE [*comes inside*]. What 'us that Andy 'us a-hollerin' about?

RUFE. Nothin' — jist more cussin'. Don't grieve about him, Jude. Everybody cain't be saved. Some are born fer glory an' some fer shame. Andy seems to be one o' them that 'us born fer shame.

JUDE [*sinks on the bed and sobs despairingly*]. 'Tain't Andy I'm a-grievin' about!

RUFE. Then it's him — Sid?

JUDE [*nods brokenly*]. Yeh!

RUFE [*closes the outside door, then seats himself on the bed beside her*]. Don't grieve 'bout him, Jude. He wusn't born fer glory, neither. You ought to build your hopes on a firmer foundation. They's still treasure in heaven if you'll seek it the right way.

JUDE [*half sobbing*]. That's what I'm a-tryin' to do, Rufe! But all my faith — everything — seems gone now!

RUFE [*moving closer, gradually*]. That's a good sign. The darkest hour o' the sperit is allus jist afore dawn. Think, Jude, what a friend we have in Him! Oh, what peace we often forfeit — oh, what needless pain we bear — all because we do not carry everything to Him in prayer!

JUDE. I want to carry it to Him, but I cain't! Seems like I'm froze up inside!

RUFE [*working himself into an emotional singsong again*]. I know what's the matter 'ith you, Jude, you ain't a-trustin' Him! [*He touches her on the shoulder, gradually stealing his arm around her.*] All you got to do is to trust Him — fully trust Him — sweetly trust Him —

JUDE [*swaying with the same emotional ecstasy as before*]. I see! Halleluyah!

RUFE. That's right! He'll save you! [*She sways with the rhythm of his words, whispering,* "Halleluyah" *ecstatically.*] You're on the right track. Go right on trustin' Him. He'll comfort you!

JUDE [*louder*]. Halleluyah! Bless His name! Halleluyah! Halleluyah!

RUFE. That's it! You're a-gittin' right now! Jist imagine you're a-leanin' on the everlastin' arms! [*She lays her head on his shoulder in a state of half consciousness.*] That's the way! He'll comfort you!

[*He has gradually inclined his face toward hers as if fascinated by the singsong of his own voice. Suddenly he kisses her passionately on the lips. She awakes from her*

stupor and stands gazing at him with an expression of intense surprise.]

RUFE. Don't look at me like that, Jude! It's perfectly all right! [*Dropping into the emotional cadence again.*] The Scripture says fer the brethren an' sisteren to greet one another with a holy kiss! That's all it wus, Jude — jist a holy kiss! Go right on trustin' Him — fully trustin' — sweetly trustin' —

JUDE [*yielding to her former mood*]. Halleluyah! Halleluyah!

RUFE. Let them that's subjec' to the law live by it. Me an' you ain't subjec' to it. We've been redeemed!

JUDE. Glory! Halleluyah!

RUFE [*slipping his arm around her again*]. It's all right, Jude! 'Tain't no harm fer the Lord's lambs to play together! Go right on trustin'!

JUDE. Glory! Glory! Halleluyah!

[*Some one is heard entering the kitchen. He releases* JUDE *and stands by the door innocently.*]

MEG [*enters from the kitchen*]. Jude, if you want sompen to do you can come out an' help me move my young turkeys. The water's might' nigh up to the coops! An' David an' Matt are busy wrastlin' 'ith them calves.

JUDE. All right, Meg.

MEG. An' while I'm here David said fer us to fix Andy so he could keep above water if the river keeps on a-comin' up like it is now.

RUFE. You an' Jude go ahead. I'll fix Andy.

MEG. Can you do it by yourself 'ithout lettin' him git loose?

RUFE. Yeh, I can manage him. I won't untie his hands. You go an' 'tend to your turkeys while you can.

[MEG *and* JUDE *go out taking the lantern. The only light in the room is the glow from the fireplace.*]

RUFE [*hesitates, then goes to the cellar door and calls softly*]. Andy! [*Getting no reply, he lifts his voice slightly.*] Andy, you ain't drownded, are you?

ANDY [*roars with suppressed rage*]. No, you ring-tailed runt! An' I ain't a-goin' to drown tell I've told 'em the truth about that shootin'! You'd better git your second verse ready! You're a-goin' to need it!

RUFE [*closes the door in a panic of fear, hesitates a moment, then opens it and calls down insinuatingly*]. All I wanted, Andy, wus to tell you that if you'll gimme your solmen word not to tell, I might mebby could help you now!

ANDY [*defiantly*]. Not by a dam' sight! I'm a-goin' to hell a-straddle o' your neck!

[RUFE *closes the door and backs away, paralyzed with fear. He thinks a moment, then rushes to the gun rack, takes down the shotgun, and goes over to the light of the fire to see if it is loaded. It is, and he moves toward the cellar door with it. But he stops halfway and comes back as if he had forgotten something.*]

RUFE [*drops on his knees, still holding the gun*]. O Lord, Thy will be done, not mine! I won't kill him lessen You want me to!

[SID *enters at the front. His clothes are torn and his face and arms are bruised and smeared with mud. He stops on seeing* RUFE *and is about to make his presence known, but changes his mind and steps back toward the door.*]

RUFE. If it's your will that he shall die too —

SID [*in a deep voice*]. Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!

RUFE [*not daring to look round*]. Is that you, God?

SID. I'm the ghost o' Sid Hunt!

RUFE [*turns fearfully and sees* SID]. Who are you a-lookin' fer? [SID *looks straight at him without speaking.* RUFE, *still on his knees, shrinks back in the corner near the bed.*] What are you a-doin' here? You don't need to be a-walkin'!

SID. I've got to ha'nt somebody. You know I didn't die a natchel death.

RUFE. All death is natchel — if you look at it right!

SID. An' all ha'ntin's natchel, too, if you look at it right.

RUFE [*shrinks back still further in a paroxysm of fear*]. You'd better go back whar you come from!

SID. I've got orders to find out who murdered me.

RUFE. Them orders may ha' come from below! You don't have to pay no 'tention to 'em!

SID. They come from above.

RUFE [*cowering*]. Who is it you got orders to ha'nt?

SID. You!

RUFE [*recoiling hysterically*]. I didn't do it! I swear on the Bible I didn't!

SID [*takes a step toward him*]. If you didn't, who did? I'm a-goin' to ha'nt you till I find out.

RUFE [*beside himself with fear*]. Then I'll tell you who done it! It 'us Him — up yonder!

SID. God?

RUFE [*nods his head in speechless awe*].

SID. How d' you know?

RUFE. I 'us thar when it happened!

SID. Will you swear that to His face afore the bar o' jedgment?

RUFE. I'll swear the truth to anybody's face anywhere any time!

SID. Then come on.

[*He beckons to* RUFE *and moves toward the door.*]

RUFE. Whar're you a-goin'?

SID. Up thar whar He is, afore the bar o' jedgment.

RUFE [*draws back in terror*]. No, Sid! I cain't! I cain't go up thar!

SID. What's the reason you cain't?

RUFE. I — I ain't dead yit!

SID. Oh, that's all right. I'll fix you up when we git outside.

RUFE. What do you want me to go up thar fer now — like this — when I ain't ready?

SID. Fer a witness ag'inst Him.

RUFE. Him — up yonder! You cain't try Him! He's Almighty!

SID. He's almighty tired o' bein' the scapegoat fer folks that do all the meanness they can think of an' call it religion!

RUFE [*whispers in awed tones*]. Have you seen Him, Sid? [SID *looks at him with Sphinx-like expression.*] Did He say I killed you?

SID. I'll tell you what He said when I git you face to face with Him.

RUFE [*draws back*]. No! If He says I done it, that settles it! Let Him be true, though every man a liar! I've allus said that an' I say it still! But what He meant, Sid, wus that I 'us his instrument!

SID [*grimly*]. I see! You done it, but you done it all fer His sake!

[*He goes toward him menacingly.*]

RUFE [*backs away, shrieking with terror*]. Don't kill me! I tell you it 'us the power o' the Lord a-workin' in me!

ANDY [*shouts from the cellar in the same tone as* RUFE'S]. Pray, brethren, pray! The day is breakin'!

SID [*stops, surprised*]. Is that Andy?

ANDY [*sings, mockingly*].

Roll, Jordan, roll! Roll, Jordan, roll!
You'd orter be in the cellar now
Jist to hear ole Jordan roll!

SID. What's Andy a-doin' in the cellar?

RUFE. Your folks put him thar!

SID. What fer?

RUFE. They thought mebby it 'us him that murdered you!

SID. Then you didn't tell 'em it 'us Him up yonder that done it?

RUFE. I hain't — yit!

SID. No, an' I reckon you hain't found time to tell 'em 'bout seein' me alive after the shootin' neither?

RUFE. Andy meant to kill you, Sid! An' that's the same thing! They wus murder in his heart!

SID. Yeh, an' I'm a-goin' to find out why!

[*He opens the cellar door and disappears inside.*]

RUFE [*rushes forward hysterically*]. He won't tell you the truth! They ain't no use ha'ntin' him!

[SID *closes the door in his face. He stands trembling a moment, undecided what to do. His eye falls on the bag which he had left by the table in the afternoon. He seizes this and rushes out at the front door. As he reaches the porch and sees that the water is up to the door, he*

recoils and comes back frantically and throws himself face downward on the bed.]

DAVID [*enters from the kitchen, speaking to* MEG *and* JUDE, *who are just behind him*]. I've never seed the water up to the kitchen doorstep afore. At this rate— [*Seeing* RUFE.] Well, Rufe, you seem to be improvin' each shinin' hour.

[MEG, JUDE, *and* MATT *enter with the two lanterns, which they place on the table.*]

RUFE [*rises from the bed, trembling in every limb*]. I've seen Sid!

MEG. Sid!

[*They all stop and look at him for an explanation.*]

RUFE. His ghost! Right here in this room! I jist been talkin' to him!

MEG. Glory be! Then he's walkin'!

JUDE. What 'd he say, Rufe?

RUFE [*starts*]. I don't mind it all now!

MEG [*swaying back and forth in a frenzy of excitement*]. Did he look natchel, Rufe? An' whar'd he go?

DAVID. Shucks, Meg! Don't let him git you all worked up over nothin'! He's lost what little mind he ever had!

MEG. Other folks has seen ghosts an' talked to 'em — folks 'ith jist as good sense as you've got!

DAVID. But only folks that believe in 'em. It's quair they don't come after the ole doubtin' Thomases like me once an' a while.

MEG. How'd he appear to you, Rufe?

RUFE. I dunno! [*The cellar door opens.* RUFE *recoils in horror.*] Here he comes now!

[ANDY *comes out of the cellar amid general consternation.*]

ANDY [*starts for* RUFE]. Hark, brother, hark! The dead are wakin'!

[RUFE *retreats to the farthest corner of the room.*]

MATT [*steps in front of* ANDY]. Here! Who turned you loose?

ANDY. Ax the ha'nt o' the man I murdered! [*Calls back into the cellar.*] Come on out, old ghost! Nobody ain't a-goin' to hurt you! I left all my silver bullets at home!

SID [*enters from the cellar*]. You couldn't hit me if you had 'em, jedgin' by the samples o' your shootin' I've seen.

JUDE. Sid! [*She takes a step toward him and stops.*] Is it you er your ghost?

SID. It's me, all right. [*He holds out his arms toward her.*] Here, tetch me an' see!

[*She touches him cautiously, then throws her arms about him.*]

MEG. An' we all thought you 'us dead!

[*She begins to weep hysterically on his shoulder.*]

SID. Now, Mam, don't you an' Jude spill no more water on me! I'm wet enough as 'tis!

MEG [*trying to control herself*]. Ain't you hurt *nowhar?*

SID. No! Andy couldn't hit a barn door!

[ANDY *looks at the floor sheepishly.*]

MEG [*flaring up at the thought*]. Well, it wusn't his fault he didn't kill you!

MATT. Yeh, he said so hisself!

[*He glares at* ANDY *menacingly.*]

SID [*goes over to* ANDY *and places his hand on his shoulder*]. Now, folks, don't go pickin' on Andy. A man o' his marksmanship deserves a lot o' sympathy. [*He glances at* RUFE.] Besides, we've been swoppin' experiences down thar in the cellar, an' we've 'bout decided it wusn't edzackly *his* fault that he shot at me.

MATT [*takes a step toward* RUFE]. Wus Rufe mixed up in that?

ANDY. Yeh, an' that ain't the worst o' his troubles! [*He goes toward* RUFE, *rolling back his sleeves significantly.*] Pray, brother, pray! The day is breaking!

[*With a suppressed cry of terror* RUFE *runs over to* MEG *for protection.*]

MEG. You keep your hands offen him!

JUDE. Yeh, you needn't go packin' it on Rufe jist to save your own skin!

SID. Now, Jude! Wait a minute! Mebby you'll change your tune when

Rufe gits through explainin' jist how I come to git drownded.

Jude. Drownded!

Sid. Yeh. This wet ain't all rain. I been in swimmin' sence I seen you last.

Meg. La! What in the world, Sid?

Sid. It all happened when that new dam give way.

David. Did that new dam bust?

Sid. It didn't edzackly bust. [*He looks straight at* Rufe.] It wus blowed up with dynamite!

[*They all turn and look at* Rufe.]

Matt. Dynamite!

Rufe [*appeals to* Meg]. I didn't do it! I swear on a stack o' Bibles I didn't!

Meg [*lays her hand on him protectingly*]. 'Course you didn't! Don't you worry! They shan't tetch you!

Rufe. It 'us Him up yonder! He done it! [*He turns to the men.*] I know *you* won't believe me, O ye o' little faith! But if it's the last word I ever utter on earth, He appeared to me in the storm an' I hyeard His voice!

Matt. Shucks!

Andy. Aw, hell!

[David *stands staring at* Rufe.]

Meg. Don't pay no 'tention to them Pharisees, Rufe! Go right on an' tell what happened!

Rufe. It 'us while you 'us all out a-lookin' fer Sid. He come in an' accused me o' aggin' Andy on to shoot him! He cussed an' reviled an' took God's name in vain!

Meg. Sid, you ought to be ashamed o' yourself!

Rufe. Then he went out to the dam to telephone an' head off Matt! I knowed the blame 'us all a-goin' to fall on me, an' I knelt thar to pray! [*Pointing.*] Right thar in that very spot! [*He looks around him and lowers his voice impressively.*] An' all of a sudden God appeared to me in thunder an' lightnin'! —

Meg [*clasps her hands in an attitude of worship*]. Glory to —

Rufe [*continues without pausing*]. An' He spoke to me in a still small voice, but loud aplenty fer me to hear!

Jude [*sways rhythmically*]. Halleluyah! Bless His name!

Meg. What'd He say?

Rufe [*with a convulsive movement of the muscles of his face*]. "Gird up your loins," He says, "an' take that box o' dynamite you got out thar in the store an' go forth an' blow up the dam while he's under thar a-telephonin'!"

[Matt *and* David *make an unconscious move toward him and stop, unable to believe their ears.* Andy *stands rigid, his eyes fixed grimly on* Rufe.]

Jude [*recoiling with horror*]. Oh!

Meg [*her whole nature transformed to venomous rage*]. Then you *did* do it! You tried to murder him!

Rufe [*backs away in terror*]. I know it seems quair now, Meg! But He works in a mysterious way! I 'us only —

Meg [*makes a move toward him with clenched hands*]. Take him out o' here and kill him! If you don't I'll —

David [*stopping her*]. Now ca'm yourself, Meg!

Rufe. I didn't do it, I tell you! I 'us only His instrument!

Matt [*reaching for his gun*]. Yeh, an' so am I!

Andy. No, Matt! This is my job! Sid's done promised me I could do it! An' I don't want no weepons — [*holding up his hands*] —jist these two instruments!

[*He makes a dash for* Rufe, *who runs into the cellar and slams the door behind him, holding it from the inside.* Andy *shakes the door, trying to open it.*]

Rufe [*behind the door*]. O Lord, if You're ever a-goin' to help me, help me now!

[*He sings frantically, without regard to the tune.*]

I am bound fer the promised land!
I am bound fer the promised land!

Andy [*still tugging at the door*]. The son of a biscuit eater! He's actially tryin' to play the same trick on God that he played on me!

Matt. What's the matter? Is he holdin' the latch?

ANDY. Yeh. It's your door, but I'll give you ten dollars to let me yank it offen its hinges!

MEG. The door don't make no difference! Go on an' git him!

MATT. Yeh, I'll stand the damage!

DAVID. Now hold on, boys!

MEG. David Hunt, are you a-stickin' up fer that reptile?

DAVID. No, Meg. But I hain't lost my belief in the Lord on Rufe's account. Fact is, I ain't so shore but what I believe in Him more 'n ever.

ANDY. Holy Moses! He's gone hell-bent fer glory, too!

MATT [*moves toward the door*]. Well, he ain't a-goin' to stop us by shoutin', "Lord!"

ANDY. Yeh, the Lord had His chance to punish Rufe an' didn't do it!

DAVID. That's jist the p'int. [ANDY *starts to break in the door.* DAVID *seizes his arm, and holds* MATT *back also.*] He didn't punish him. But He may do it yit if you give Him a chance. [*Quickly, as they show signs of impatience.*] An' arter what's happened here to-night we'd orter be willin' to foller the Lord uphill back'ards 'ith our eyes shet!

ANDY. Arter what's happened here to-night!

DAVID. Edzackly! Take it right straight through from beginnin' to end an' the Lord's been on our side every pop — even to blowin' up that dad-burned dam that had never orter been put in!

MATT. That's so! I hadn't thought o' that!

ANDY. Aw! I've seen all I want o' that love-your-enemy truck to-night! I'm a-goin' through that door!

SID [*who has gone to the door to look at the river, comes toward* ANDY]. Well, don't be so brash about it, Andy. I expect Gran'pap's right —

ANDY. Well, I'll be — Have you gone crazy, too?

SID. No, but I believe in givin' everybody a chance — includin' the Lord. This is a job I expect He understands better'n we do. An' we're all in His hands jist now. You see the river ain't through risin' yit. It'll be over the top o' this house afore mornin' unless a merricle happens.

[*They are all sobered by this and turn toward* SID *anxiously.*]

DAVID. What makes you think that?

SID. While I 'us down thar under the dam a-telephonin', a message come through that all the dams between here an' Asheville had busted an' the river 'us a-sweepin' everything afore it. It 'us twenty-five feet above highwater at Eagle Bluff. An' they said if this new dam didn't hold it'ld be lots wuss down here afore mornin'.

DAVID. Then we're all a-goin' to have to swim fer our lives!

MEG. Has the water s'rrounded the house?

MATT. Yeh. It's six feet deep twixt here an' the nearest hill!

MEG. Then they ain't nothin' left fer me an' Jude to do but pray, fer we cain't swim!

SID [*smiles and pats her on the back.*] Cheer up, Mam! Things ain't as bad as that yit. As I 'us a-comin' down the river in that turmoil o' water I hooked on to a loose boat and fetched it ashore with me. It's tied out thar now. An' we'd better not lose much time a-gittin' in it, fer that dam'll bust up in sections. An' they's liable to be another wave like the first un.

MEG. Is they room in the boat to take anything with us, Sid?

SID. No, nothin' but ourselves.

DAVID [*takes his rifle from the rack*]. Well, I'm a-goin' to take this ole gun if I have to swim!

[MEG *begins snatching a few small things from the table and mantel.* MATT *takes the shotgun.*]

SID [*goes toward the door*]. Come on, Andy. I want you to handle a oar.

RUFE [*shouts from the cellar*]. You ain't a-goin' to leave me here to drownd? I cain't swim, neither!

ANDY. What makes you think you're a-goin' to drownd? Keep right on trustin' Him up yonder! He'll save you if you've done as much fer Him as you say you have!

[*He goes out at the front with* SID.

RUFE *is heard praying as* MEG, JUDE, MATT, *and* DAVID *finish gathering up their things and follow* SID *and* ANDY.]

RUFE. O God, save me! You can save me if You will! I dunno how, but I know You can! I've got faith in You! I never have doubted You, an' I ain't a-goin' to doubt You now jist because I'm in a tight place! But everybody ain't like me, God! They's lots o' folks that has to have proof! An' if You save the others an' don't save me, like the fool, they're a-goin' to say in their hearts they ain't no God! [*There is a moment's silence. He opens the cellar door and peeps out cautiously. Seeing that the room is empty, he rushes to the front door and looks out, then shrinks back, terrified by what he sees.*] They're right! [*His voice drops to a hoarse whisper.*] They ain't no God! [*A malignant expression sweeps over his face.*] If they is He hain't got no use fer folks like me! He's fer them that's on top! That's what He is! [*He suddenly rises on his toes, as if impelled by some power outside himself, and hurls defiance toward heaven.*] Damn you, God! [*He gradually collapses, muttering brokenly in a fit of terror.*] Now I've done it! I've committed the unpardonable sin! [*Then he screams hysterically as the curtain falls.*] Help! Help! Come here, everybody, come here!

THE END

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Other plays of the southern mountaineers:

Ruint (Hatcher Hughes)
Carolina Folk Plays (Frederick H. Koch, editor)
Sun Up (Lula Vollmer)
This Fine Pretty World (Percy MacKaye)

QUESTIONS ON "HELL BENT FER HEAVEN"

1. Is the play a melodrama?
2. Comment on the language of the play. Compare the language with that of *Juno and the Paycock.*
3. Analyze carefully Rufe's character. To what extent does he gain your sympathy?
4. Why does the author have Sid a returned soldier?
5. Do you agree with the assertion that Rufe "is a broad caricature of American life"?
6. What are the source and nature of the humor of the play?

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN AND MARC CONNELLY

George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly have been generous contributors to the gaiety of the American stage since February 14, 1921, when the first-fruits of their successful partnership, *Dulcy,* had its *première* presentation in Indianapolis. Together with George Kelly they have achieved a new American domestic comedy that is urbane, penetrating, and vastly amusing. They have rescued the American comic stage from an almost steady diet of "comedy-drama" and so-called uproarious farces in which most of the roaring occurred on the stage and not in the audience. Around such inelastic types as the humorless old maid, the country rube, the Dutch, Jewish, and Irish "comedians," the negro servant incredibly inept but unfailingly loyal to the fortunes of the guileless hero and heroine; and around such theatricalities as mistaken identity, use of disguise, and a few other stereotyped complications arose the action of the older comedy. The infrequent occurrence of a George Ade or Langdon Mitchell or Jesse Lynch Williams offered but little relief. With George Kelly, Rachel Crothers, Clare Kummer, Maxwell Anderson, Booth Tarkington, Kaufman, and Connelly, an intelligent American comedy has arrived.

Both George Kaufman and Marc Connelly are Pennsylvanians the former having been born in Pittsburgh in 1889, and the latter in McKeesport in 1890. Both were newspaper reporters, columnists, and dramatic critics for a number of years. Both have contributed frequently to *Life* and similar publications. Both have written the lyrics and dialogue for numerous musical comedies. Neither is a college man, but all the world is a university for him who has an observing eye, an interpretative faculty, and a feeling for proportion. Kaufman and Connelly have an acute sense of the extravagant and ludicrous in folk-way and character. They achieve humor by accurate reporting of the humorous, and except in their single excursion into expressionism — *Beggar On Horseback* — they avoid exaggeration, the basis of most American humor. We find ourselves smiling at event and remark that have been a hitherto unnoticed part of our daily adventure. With the rise of the curtain the authors succeed not only in giving us the magic power of seeing ourselves as others see us, but also in making us laugh at ourselves: the sense of humor, of proportion, is made contagious.

Dulcy, their first partnership play, illustrates well the old saw that when a stupid person makes up his mind to do a good deed, someone has to suffer. Out of F. P. A.'s column in the New York *Tribune* came Dulcy, fatuous and blundering, with the unselfish and devastating ambition to further her husband's welfare. *To The Ladies!* (1922) marks a sharp advance in the quality of the humor and in originality. With its brisk, inescapable satire on the American worship of commercial success it combines a very human story of a young wife whose great love for her commonplace husband magnified, in her eyes, his ordinary accomplishments, and who never shared the disillusion of the audience. The banquet scene, in which she rescues her stupid husband, as does Maggie Shand in *What Every Woman Knows,* has genuine dramatic power as well as delicious satire. *Merton Of The Movies* (1922), their greatest popular success, extended the field of their satire to Hollywood, which is not invulnerable. Mr. Kaufman collaborated with Edna Ferber in writing *Minick* (1924), and *The Royal Family* (1928), and he alone wrote *The Butter And Egg Man,* and the musical comedy *The Cocoanuts* in collaboration with Irving Berlin. Mr. Connelly has written independently *The Wisdom Tooth.* Both playwrights reveal a keen knowledge of American life, and what is more important, of human nature.

The idea of *Beggar On Horseback* was borrowed from Paul Apel's *Hans Sonnenstorsers Hollenfahrt* (Johnny Sunstormer's Trip to Hell), but except for the general idea, the American authors owe nothing to the German playwright. For the first time the authors cast aside the trammels of realism, and plunged into a breath-

taking *extravaganza* that amazes as much by its thick-coming fancies [illegible] with its satire and exaggeration. The most faithful realism could not catch the spirit of America more accurately than does this series of mad dream pictures. Pitilessly are exposed all the varieties of hokum and the complacency in which we live and move and have our being. The triviality, the materialism, the crass worship of success that devitalizes much of American life; the emptiness, which the noise and blatancy and magnitude of externals do not conceal; our comic opera murder trials; our tabloid newsheets written or photographed down to a moronic level; amazing red tape that is revered as efficiency; a depressing search for pleasure and excitement which masquerade as happiness; the impatience with those amenities of a civilized and adult existence which are not immediately translatable into their monetary equivalent — it is a thoughtful laughter that the authors lead us to bestow upon these stupidities and absurdities.

But it is laughter, finally, and not scorn, that the play excites. If the pantomime episode is sentimental, we forgive, for even the sentimental is a step in advance of the enormous complacency and prose of life about us. The treatment is almost consistently hilarious, however, and only after the laughter begins to die down do we realize that the shafts have struck us. To know *Beggar On Horseback* is to know ourselves and contemporary America a little better.

BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK (1924)

BY

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN AND
MARC CONNELLY

CHARACTERS

DR. ALBERT RICE
CYNTHIA MASON
NEIL MCRAE
MR. CADY
MRS. CADY
GLADYS CADY
HOMER CADY
A BUTLER
JERRY
A BUSINESS MAN
A POET
MISS HEY
MISS YOU
A WAITER
A REPORTER
A JUROR
A GUIDE
A SIGHTSEER
A NOVELIST
A SONG-WRITER
AN ARTIST

The Play Begins in the Apartment of Neil McRae

The Pantomime — During Part II

A KISS IN XANADU

H. R. H. THE CROWN PRINCE OF XANADU
H. R. H. THE CROWN PRINCESS OF XANADU
FIRST LADY IN WAITING
FIRST LORD OF THE BEDCHAMBER
A LAMPLIGHTER
A POLICEMAN

Scene I — The Royal Bedchamber
Scene II — A Public Park
Scene III — The Bedchamber Again

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BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK

ACT I

The scene is NEIL MCRAE'S *apartment in a comfortable, run-down and not very expensive building. It is plainly an artist's room, and furnished with as many good looking things as the occupant could afford — which are not many. The most luxurious piece of furniture in the room is a grand piano, which* NEIL *has probably hung on to with no little difficulty. It stands well down left. Down right is an easy chair — the only chair in the room that even suggests comfort — and against the rear wall is* NEIL'S *desk. In front of the desk is a swivel chair, and two or three other chairs, stiff-backed, stand around the room. At the left of the stage, near the piano, is a window, hung with chintz curtains that have seen better days — curtains which come to life here and there in great splotches of red. Some of the same stuff hangs in a center doorway — a doorway that leads to* NEIL'S *bedroom and thence to a "kitchenette." The door into the apartment is at the right — somewhere beyond it is the elevator, and one needs only a look at the room to know that it is an elevator that requires four minutes to ascend the three floors.*

The time is about four-thirty of a Spring afternoon. The curtain rises on the room and nothing more; then, after a second, there comes a knock on the door. The knock is repeated, then the knob is cautiously turned and the door slowly opens. DR. ALBERT RICE, *a young man of thirty or so, peers inquiringly into the room through the widening crack, sees no one, and enters.*

ALBERT. Neil!

[*There is no answer; he observes the room. Slightly to his surprise, he sees a sewing basket on the piano.*] Are you married?

[*He goes up to the bedroom entrance and peers into the semi-darkness.*] Neil!

[CYNTHIA MASON, *who seems to be about twenty-five, appears suddenly in the doorway at right. There is a moment of uncertainty as she and the doctor confront each other.*]

CYNTHIA. Are you looking for Mr. McRae?

ALBERT. Yes. The door was open.

CYNTHIA [*disturbed*]. Really? Was it wide open?

ALBERT. It was closed, but it wasn't locked.

CYNTHIA. Oh! [*There is a pause of uncertainty.*] Was Mr. McRae expecting you?

ALBERT. No — I just got in from Chicago. Neil and I are old friends. My name is Rice.

CYNTHIA. Oh! You're not *Doctor* Rice?

ALBERT. Yes.

CYNTHIA [*laughing*]. I'm so relieved! My name is Cynthia Mason, Dr. Rice. I know a great deal about *you.*

[*They shake hands.*]

ALBERT. Of course Neil never writes letters, so you've been concealed from me. You didn't know him a few months ago, did you, when I left New York?

CYNTHIA. No, only since he moved here. I live across the hall.

ALBERT. Oh, I see.

CYNTHIA [*looking around*]. There's that work basket. [*She takes it from*

the piano, then faces the doctor again.] I hope you'll forgive me, when I tell you why I lingered.

ALBERT. You're forgiven.

CYNTHIA. Night before last we had burglars.

ALBERT. Really?

CYNTHIA. Not on this floor — the apartment below. The poor man lost three or four suits of clothes, so —

ALBERT [*with an understanding smile*]. So Neil leaves his door unlocked.

CYNTHIA. Probably since early this morning. Though I'm afraid the burglar who took Neil's clothes wouldn't do very well.

ALBERT [*with a look around the room*]. No, I suppose not.

CYNTHIA [*a pause; she turns, with an air of finality*]. Well, he'll be here soon.

ALBERT. You're not going?

CYNTHIA. I must. Neil has some people coming to tea.

ALBERT [*bent on holding her*]. Well — now, how do you know I'm *not* the burglar?

CYNTHIA. Because I don't believe there are such things as gentlemen burglars.

[*She drops a half curtsy; turns again toward the door.*]

ALBERT. Oh, wait! What did Neil tell you about me?

CYNTHIA. Let me see. He said you were extremely brilliant. But too versatile.

ALBERT. Brilliant, yes. But versatile — on the contrary, I'm going to become a specialist.

CYNTHIA. Sometimes I wonder what's happened to all the young men who used to become just doctors.

ALBERT. They all died of starvation.

[*There is a pause;* CYNTHIA *looks at her watch.*]

CYNTHIA. I don't know why Neil isn't here.

ALBERT. You don't expect *him* to be prompt, do you?

CYNTHIA. But he has some people coming. You may know them — their name is Cady.

ALBERT. Cady? Not the Cadys from Livingston?

CYNTHIA. Yes — *do* you know them?

ALBERT. I'm not sure — I think I used to. You know, I lived in Livingston myself, a long time ago.

CYNTHIA. So Neil told me.

ALBERT [*puzzled*]. The Cady's? What are *they* coming for?

CYNTHIA. Miss Cady is Neil's pupil.

ALBERT. You mean he's giving her music lessons?

CYNTHIA. He is.

ALBERT. But he's not a teacher. [*He waits for a denial.*] *Is* he?

CYNTHIA. He *must* do something.

ALBERT [*with a sigh*]. Things aren't any better with him, then?

CYNTHIA. Well, he isn't ready to retire.

ALBERT [*with a shake of the head*]. I suppose he'll always go on this way. He's so — utterly improvident, so —

CYNTHIA [*rallying to his defense*]. Well — he's really improved in that way. He may surprise you.

ALBERT. He certainly would.

CYNTHIA. He's saving money! [*Her tone changes.*] But the trouble is — he's working so hard to get it.

ALBERT. You mean giving music lessons?

CYNTHIA. Worse. You've got to talk to him — he won't listen to me. He's been sitting up night after night —

NEIL [*heard in the hallway*]. Halloo!

[*He kicks open the door and enters. He is carrying a pile of books, and on top of the pile a music portfolio. He sees* ALBERT; *dumps the books abruptly into the easy chair.*]

Albert! Well, I'll be damned!

[*Tosses his hat into the bedroom; seizes* ALBERT'S *hand.*]

ALBERT. Mr. McRae, I believe?

NEIL. Where did you come from? Chicago?

ALBERT. This morning. Of course, you never told me you'd moved. How are you?

NEIL. Never felt better! Gosh, I'm glad you're back! You've met Cynthia?

CYNTHIA. Well, we've been talking. I thought I'd caught the burglar.

NEIL. Did you find him in here? [*To* ALBERT.] How did you get in?

ALBERT [*elaborately*]. First I turned the knob of the door—

CYNTHIA. And, as you hadn't locked it, he had no difficulty in entering. [*She turns to the books in the easy chair.*] What are these?

NEIL. Why—just some books.

CYNTHIA [*takes one up*]. "Life of Charles I." Neil!

NEIL. Well—I used to be very interested in history, and especially—

CYNTHIA [*severely*]. The truth, Neil!

NEIL. I—I bought them, that's all.

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil. After your promise!

NEIL. Well— [*To* ALBERT.] Just take a look at this binding.

ALBERT [*giving no encouragement*]. Yes. I see it.

CYNTHIA [*determined*]. Neil, where did you get them?

NEIL [*still to* ALBERT]. There was a burglary downstairs, and this fellow lost all his clothes.

CYNTHIA [*resigned*]. And you bought these books from him.

NEIL. Well—ah—

CYNTHIA. You work at these terrible orchestrations to *make* a little money, and then—did you go to bed at all last night?

NEIL. Of course I did.

CYNTHIA. Doctor, you *will* talk to him, won't you? [*She takes up her work basket.*] I'm sure he hasn't been sleeping—he hasn't been doing *anything* he should.

[*She is heading for the door.*]

NEIL. You're not going?

CYNTHIA. I am. You have people coming to tea, remember.

NEIL. Good heavens, what time is it?

CYNTHIA. Nearly five. I suppose you have everything ready?

NEIL. Why, yes—I've got—that is, I think— [*He smiles helplessly.*] Be a darling and help me, will you?

CYNTHIA. Are you sure you have everything?

[*Knowing well that he hasn't.*]

NEIL. I think so.

CYNTHIA. He thinks so.

[*This to* ALBERT, *with a smile, as she goes through the bedroom doorway.*]

ALBERT. She's charming, Neil.

NEIL. Isn't she? [*He moves the portfolio from the chair to the desk*]. She's a designer in one of the big dressmaking firms. Did she tell you how we met?

ALBERT. No.

NEIL. She lives across the hall. [*He raises his voice for* CYNTHIA's *benefit.*] She thinks she can play the piano.

CYNTHIA [*in the kitchen*]. I can!

NEIL. You cannot! [*To* ALBERT.] One night I knocked on her door and asked her to stop. She did. We've been great pals ever since. [*Calling to* CYNTHIA.] Can I help you, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA. No, nor anyone else. [*She returns.*] Do you remember when you last had any tea?

NEIL. The other day.

CYNTHIA. You have three leaves left.

[*She exhibits them.*]

NEIL [*inspects them*]. Four!

CYNTHIA. And did you know that your toast machine was burnt out?

NEIL. Oh, yes—I forgot. But I'm sure there's some tea—I remember—no, I used the last of it early this morning. I'll run right out—

[*He is about to start.*]

CYNTHIA [*holding him*]. Neil!

NEIL. What?

CYNTHIA. Then you *were* up all night?

NEIL. Why—not exactly.

CYNTHIA [*to the doctor*]. He's been sitting up making orchestrations for a cheap little music publisher. Neil, it's like copying bad paintings. Doctor, you must make him stop.

NEIL. Well—I'll go out and get some tea.

CYNTHIA. No! You stay and talk to the Doctor. I'll bring everything over from my place.

[*Again she picks up the basket.*]

NEIL. I can't let you do that. Let me help.

CYNTHIA. I will not. [*She goes.*]

NEIL [*more to himself than to* ALBERT]. I could have sworn I had everything.

ALBERT. She'll take care of things. [*He*

is near the window.] Come over here and let me see you.

NEIL. Now, you're not going to fuss over me just because I've been doing some work.

ALBERT. No. But I want to look at you.

[*An orchestra, in a restaurant across the street, strikes up a jazz tune. It comes faintly through the window.*]

NEIL. Good Lord, that again!

ALBERT. What?

NEIL. That damned cabaret orchestra across the street. It begins at five every afternoon.

ALBERT. You *are* nervous, aren't you?

NEIL. Huh? No. I just don't like that music.

ALBERT. *Did* you work all night?

NEIL. Some of it.

ALBERT. It's bad business, Neil. [*He feels for his pulse.*] How many Cadys are coming to tea?

NEIL. Oh, did Cynthia tell you? You remember the Cadys.

ALBERT. Vaguely. I don't suppose they'd know me. Do they live here now?

NEIL. They moved East a few months ago. Gladys is my one and only music pupil.

ALBERT [*watch in hand*]. Rich, I suppose?

NEIL. Lord, yes. Millions.

ALBERT. What did he make it in?

[*He puts away the watch.*]

NEIL. Funny—I don't even know. Manufactures something.

ALBERT [*trying to remember*]. Just the one daughter, isn't there?

NEIL. Yes. [*Adds, as an afterthought.*] There's a brother.

ALBERT [*recalls him, apparently none too pleasantly*]. I remember him.

NEIL. I *had* to ask them. For heaven's sake, stay and help out.

ALBERT [*with a laugh*]. Well, I'll stay a little while. [*Feels for his pipe.*]

NEIL. Try to get away. [ALBERT *laughs, lightly.*] Well, what's the verdict on *me?*

ALBERT. You're just a little tired, that's all. Sort of nervous.

NEIL. Nonsense.

ALBERT. Got any tobacco?

NEIL. Right there on the desk.

ALBERT [*fooling with the tobacco jar unable to open it*]. Have you been writing *anything* of your own?

NEIL. Well, no—only snatches of things. I'm going to get back at it soon, though.

ALBERT. That's good. [*The jar in hand.*] How do you open this thing?

NEIL [*takes up a paper knife from the piano—a knife of ivory, scimitar shaped, and with a long black tassel hanging from it.*] I use this. Give it to me.

[ALBERT *hands it over;* NEIL *opens and returns it, all without a word.*

ALBERT [*filling his pipe*]. How old is the daughter now?

NEIL. Gladys?

ALBERT. Yes.

NEIL. Twenty-two or three—I don't know. Why?

[*He puts the knife back on the piano.*

ALBERT. How soon will they be here?

NEIL. Any minute, I guess. Why all the questions?

ALBERT. I just wondered. [*Takes medical case from his pocket and shakes out a pill.*] I want you to take one of these before they come, and another one later on.

NEIL. Good heavens, there's nothing the matter with me.

ALBERT. I know there isn't.

NEIL. What'll they do—make me sleep?

ALBERT. They'll quiet you.

NEIL. But I don't dare go to sleep In the first place the Cadys are coming and—

[CYNTHIA *re-enters. She is now hatless, and carries a folded table cloth.*]

CYNTHIA. I hope you scolded him.

[*She goes to the desk and begins to spread the cloth.*]

ALBERT. Not enough, I'm afraid. [*In hand.*] Do you think you have a glass of water left?

NEIL [*starting*]. Oh, of course!

ALBERT. No, no. I can find it.

[*He goes into the bedroom.*

CYNTHIA [*with a glance at the portfolio*]. You didn't let them give you more to do?

NEIL. Well, hardly any. It's all right.

CYNTHIA. It *isn't* all right. Oh, I wouldn't mind if it were something decent! But it's perfectly sickening to think of your genius being choked to death in this way!

NEIL. I'll work on the symphony soon, honestly.

CYNTHIA. And then make up for it by mere hack-work. I wish someone would subsidize you.

NEIL. That would be nice.

[ALBERT *comes back with the glass of water.*]

ALBERT. Here you are!

[*Gives* NEIL *pill and glass.*]

NEIL. Oh, all right. But there's nothing the matter with me.

[*He takes the pill.*]

ALBERT. How was it?

NEIL. I've tasted better. [*The orchestra across the street is heard in another outburst of jazz.*] Would you believe that people actually enjoy that? Wait! I've got one here that will be next month's national anthem. [*Searches for it in portfolio.*] There aren't any words to it yet, but it's going to be called "Sweet Mamma."

CYNTHIA. Don't, Neil. Play Dr. Rice the second movement of your symphony.

NEIL. Want to hear it?

ALBERT. You bet. [*He indicates the pipe.*] Do you mind?

CYNTHIA. Not at all.

NEIL. She calls it the second movement because there isn't any first.

CYNTHIA [*finding it*]. Here!

[*She spreads the manuscript on the rack.*]

NEIL. You understand this is just a movement. It's— [*He sees place that needs correction.*] Oh! [*Starts fishing for a pencil.*] Of course I never have a pencil. [CYNTHIA *gets one from his left vest pocket and hands it to him.*] Oh, thanks! [*He makes the correction.*] It's just a sketch. Not finished, you know.

CYNTHIA. But it's going to be — and soon.

[NEIL *starts to play, but is not far into it when the phone rings.*]

NEIL [*stops playing*]. I'll bet that's the Cadys. [*Goes to the phone.*] Hello! [*To* CYNTHIA.] It is. Downstairs. . . . Send them right up, Jerry.

CYNTHIA. Good heavens, I'll have to bring the tea things in.

NEIL. Why not?

CYNTHIA. They don't want to meet me.

NEIL. Don't be foolish.

CYNTHIA. Well — I won't stay.

[*She goes.*]

NEIL. I suppose I ought to clear things up a bit.

ALBERT [*with a glance at the books in the easy chair*]. If you expect them to sit down.

[NEIL *carries the books into his bedroom. He returns, counts the chairs, then tests a spindley-legged one that stands center.*]

NEIL. I hope nobody heavy sits in this.

[*Voices are heard in the hall, and* MR. *and* MRS. CADY, HOMER *and* GLADYS *appear at the open door.* MRS. CADY *enters first, then* GLADYS, *then* MR. CADY, *and* HOMER. *Together they make up an average Middle West family. They have no marked external characteristics except that* HOMER *is wearing a violent yellow tie.*]

MRS. CADY. Why, Neil!

NEIL. How are you, Mrs. Cady? Gladys?

MRS. CADY. After all these years!

GLADYS. Hello, Neil!

CADY. Well, well, Neil, my boy!

NEIL. Hello, Mr. Cady!

HOMER. Hello, there!

NEIL. How are you, Homer?

HOMER. Not so good.

NEIL [*feeling keenly his position as host*]. Ah — this is Dr. Rice. Mr. and Mrs. Cady, and — Miss Cady and — Gladys.

[*His voice trails off. There are the*

indistinct greetings that follow an introduction.]

MRS. CADY. Doctor, did you say?

ALBERT. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. CADY. Homer, here's a doctor.

HOMER. Yes?

MRS. CADY. Homer's had a good deal of trouble from time to time. Sit here, Homer — in this easy chair.

[HOMER *takes the only easy chair.*]

NEIL [*delinquent*]. Oh, yes — sit down, everybody. I'm sorry I — ah —

MRS. CADY. Oh, that's all right. We'll just settle ourselves.

[*She sits in the swivel chair at the desk.*]

NEIL [*stirring up conversation*]. Ah — Dr. Rice comes from Livingston, too.

MRS. CADY. Really?

CADY. That so?

ALBERT. Oh, a long time ago. We moved away when I was very young.

MRS. CADY. I wonder if I — [*There is a sneeze from* HOMER.] — Are you all right, Homer?

HOMER. Yes.

[*Something in his tone says that he is as all right as possible, considering where he is.*]

MRS. CADY [*blandly finishing*]. — knew your people?

HOMER. *I* don't remember them.

[*You gather that* ALBERT *just couldn't have had any people.*]

CADY [*at the telephone*]. Mind if I use this?

NEIL. Oh, no, of course not.

CADY. Thanks. I left the office a little early.

[*Takes the receiver off.*]

MRS. CADY [*bent on placing the doctor*]. Let me see. *Old* Mrs. Rice —

CADY. Cortlandt 8262.

MRS. CADY. I guess you're not the same.

[*There is a half-query in her voice.*]

ALBERT. Well, as a matter of fact, I moved away just after you came there.

MRS. CADY. Oh, I see.

GLADYS [*producing a box of candy*]. I brought you some candy for your tea, Neil.

NEIL. Oh, thanks. [*To* MRS. CADY, *who is teetering in the desk chair:*] There's another chair if —

MRS. CADY. No, I like this. Feels like my rocking chair at home.

[*She sways back and forth.*]

GLADYS. Mother's favorite chair is her rocker.

MRS. CADY. There's nothing like an old-fashioned rocking chair.

CADY [*at the phone*]. Let me talk to Burgess.

MRS. CADY. Mr. Cady says I'm chair-bound. Just joking, you know. [*She explains elaborately, to* ALBERT.] Mr. Cady. Says I'm chair-bound.

ALBERT [*just the news he was waiting for*]. Oh, yes.

MRS. CADY. Let me see: there were two families of Rice out there, and I remember that one of them came here, just before we left.

[*She finishes in a sibilant whisper, having been shushed by her husband.*]

CADY [*simultaneously*]. Burgess? Any word from 653? . . . Hush, mother. . . . Well, I'll tell you what to do. We ought to send a tracer. . . . That's right. . . . Well, I'll tell you what to do — if you don't hear by six o'clock send a tracer. That's all.

[CADY *hangs up: turns to* NEIL.]

CADY. Much obliged. When I get a foot away from a telephone I'm lost. [*He starts for the weak chair;* NEIL *makes a movement.*] What is it?

NEIL. That chair isn't very strong.

CADY. Oh, I'll be careful.

NEIL [*not exactly at ease*]. We're going to have some — tea and things — pretty soon now.

CADY [*has taken out a cigar*]. Match?

NEIL [*starting*]. How's that?

CADY. Match.

NEIL. Oh, yes! Right here.

[NEIL *lights his cigar.*]

GLADYS [*taking in the room*]. S mama, isn't it cute?

MRS. CADY. Yes, indeed.

GLADYS. There's the piano over the

MRS. CADY. Oh, yes. [*Everybo looks at the piano.*] Neil must pl something for us.

[*It is Remark No. 80 and purely perfunctory.*]

CADY. It's certainly very nice. We've been hearing quite a bit about you, Neil.

NEIL. Is that so?

CADY. Hear you've become quite a musician since you went away from Livingston.

NEIL. Oh, I don't know.

CADY. Well, Gladys has been telling us so. So we thought we'd come and find out for ourselves. Gave up a golf game to do it, too. Play golf?

NEIL. No, I don't.

CADY. Play golf, Doctor?

ALBERT. I'm sorry.

CADY. Well, everybody ought to. Great exercise. Keeps a man fit for business. I'd make Homer do it, if he wasn't so delicate.

[HOMER *shifts in his seat.*]

MRS. CADY. Comfortable, Homer?

HOMER [*carelessly*]. Um-hum.

[CYNTHIA *comes in with the tea things.*]

NEIL. Oh, here we are! I—I want you to meet Miss Mason. She's brought the things over from her place.

MRS. CADY. Oh, I see.

NEIL [*beginning again the weary round of introductions*]. Mrs. Cady and —of course you know Gladys—

GLADYS. Yes.

CYNTHIA. How are you, Miss Cady?

NEIL. And Mr. Cady and—another Mr. Cady. [HOMER *does not rise. Mumbled greetings are exchanged.*] Miss Mason lives—just across the hall.

MRS. CADY. Yes, so Gladys has told s. Are you a musician, too, Miss Mason?

CYNTHIA. No, I'm not, Mrs. Cady.

MRS. CADY [*turning to her husband*]. Don't she make you think of Elizabeth Merkle, Fred?

CADY. Well—I see what you mean.

HOMER [*ever the dissenter*]. She don't ne.

MRS. CADY. Of course Elizabeth's dark, ut there's something about the shape f the face. [*To* NEIL.] *You* knew the Merkles, Neil. Mr. Merkle had the kating rink.

NEIL. Oh, yes. Elizabeth was a little girl when I knew her.

MRS. CADY. She's twenty-two or three. Twenty-three, isn't she, Fred?

CADY. Yes, I guess so.

HOMER. Lizzie Merkle's crazy. She's going to marry Lou Carmichael.

GLADYS. Oh, did grandma say when it was to be?

MRS. CADY. No, I don't think they know themselves. You knew Lou, didn't you, Neil?

[CYNTHIA *is serving tea.*]

NEIL. Did they live over on Pine Street?

MRS. CADY. I think they did.

HOMER. No, they didn't.

GLADYS. Hush up! They did. They lived next door to Dr. Endicott.

HOMER. They did not. They've always lived on Mead Avenue.

GLADYS. Well, I guess I ought to know. Didn't I go and meet his sister once? Remember that tall girl, mama?

HOMER. You're crazy.

MRS. CADY. Lou used to take Gladys to dances a lot.

GLADYS. He was a wonderful dancer! [*She giggles.*]

MRS. CADY. He was with the telephone company.

HOMER [*scornfully*]. Charlie Ferris nearly beat him up.

MRS. CADY. Remember when he and Charlie Ferris were crazy about Gladys? This girl's had more boys crazy about her, Neil.

[CYNTHIA *gives tea to* CADY.]

GLADYS. Oh, I never cared for either of them.

HOMER. You never let them *think* so.

GLADYS [*smugly*]. Homer!

HOMER [*to* NEIL, *unpleasantly, as he passes tea to him*]. No, thanks. Tea always sits on me.

CADY. Say, I hear your Uncle James is dead, Neil. Leave you anything?

NEIL. No—Uncle James never had anything.

CADY. Too bad. He was a fine man. Everybody was sorry when he moved to Boston.

MRS. CADY. He was nice. [*To* CYN-

THIA.] We used to sing together in Sunday school when we were children.

NEIL. I remember you sang in the choir.

MRS. CADY. Mama still sings, when she lets herself go.

HOMER. We call her Galli-Curci.

MRS. CADY [*genially*]. They're always joking about my voice. But I do love old hymns. Your father was a good singer, too, Neil.

NEIL. I guess he was a better lawyer.

CADY. Yes, everybody had a great deal of respect for John McRae.

MRS. CADY. He was a beautiful character.

CADY. He'd give his money away to everybody. Afraid he never made very much, though. Lawyers don't, as a rule. Neil, did you know that when I was a young man I studied law — right in the same office with your father?

NEIL. No? Did you?

CADY. Yes, sir. Had it all figured out to be a judge — Judge Cady — till I found out what was the most a judge could make.

[*Puts his tea down, almost untasted.*]

CYNTHIA. Too strong?

CADY. No. I'm not much of a tea drinker.

MRS. CADY. I guess Gladys and I are the tea drinkers in our family. We have it every afternoon.

[NEIL *is opening the candy box.*]

GLADYS. Neil's going to come up and have some with us next week. Tuesday.

NEIL. Candy?

[MRS. CADY *takes a piece; so does* MR. CADY.]

MRS. CADY. That's nice. We'll have some people in. I want you to see the new house. My, I don't know what the folks would say back in Livingston if they could see it. Remember our house in Livingston, Neil?

NEIL. Yes, indeed.

[*He passes the candy box to* HOMER, *who waves it disdainfully aside.*]

MRS. CADY [*trying to be bantering*]. You ought to. You were there enough. Every afternoon, pretty near. Neil and Gladys would play together and I'd go out in the kitchen and make candy for them. [*She rocks.*]

GLADYS. Oh, yes! Wasn't it fun Neil?

MRS. CADY. We always saved some pieces for Mr. Cady. All the Cadys are fond of candy. Aren't they, Fred?

[*She taps his knee.*]

CADY [*munching*]. Guess that's right, mother.

HOMER. I'm not.

MRS. CADY. Except Homer. [*She resumes, largely to herself.*] All the Cadys eat candy.

CYNTHIA. And now — if you'll excuse me. [*Rises.*]

NEIL. Oh, you're not going?

[HOMER *doesn't rise with the other men.*]

CYNTHIA. I'm afraid I must.

CADY. That's too bad.

MRS. CADY. Well, I hope we meet again.

CYNTHIA. I just ran in for a moment to be temporary hostess.

GLADYS. Goodbye, Miss Mason.

CYNTHIA [*to* ALBERT]. I hope I'll see you again.

[*Shakes his hand.*]

ALBERT. Oh, I'll be back in a few weeks.

[*There are further goodbyes.* CYNTHIA *goes.*]

MRS. CADY [*looking after her*]. She *is* like Elizabeth.

CADY [*noisily*]. Well — how are things generally, Neil? Making a lot of money out of your music?

NEIL. No — with music you don't make a great deal of money.

CADY. I don't know about that. It's just like any other business. Maybe you're not giving them what they want.

MRS. CADY. I guess Neil's doing his best, aren't you, Neil?

CADY. We've all got to please the public. Eh, Doctor?

ALBERT. Oh, yes.

CADY. I've got to in my business. Of course I don't claim to know anything about music, but I think I represent about the average viewpoint. Now, what I like is a good lively tune — something with a little snap to it. As I under-

stand it, though, you sort of go in for — highbrow music.

NEIL. It isn't exactly that.

CADY. Well, there's no money in it. You know what happened to your father.

MRS. CADY. Had to scrape all his life. [*Turns to* ALBERT.] Neil's father. Had to scrape all his life.

CADY. A young fellow's got to look out for his future, I claim — got to save up a little money.

NEIL [*puzzled*]. Yes, sir.

MRS. CADY [*helping along what is clearly a prearranged conversation*]. In some *business,* Mr. Cady means.

CADY. Yes. Now you take — well, my business, for example. We've always got an opening for — a bright young fellow.

NEIL. You mean — *me* — in your business?

CADY. Well, I just mentioned that for example.

NEIL. I — I'm afraid I wouldn't be much good in business, Mr. Cady.

MRS. CADY. Of course you'd be good.

NEIL. I did work once in an office, and I guess I wasn't — very —

CADY. That's all right. You'd learn. The idea is you'd be making money. Some day you'd maybe have a nice interest in the firm. 'Tain't as though you couldn't write a little music now and then in your spare time, and we'd be sort of all together.

[*The jazz orchestra is heard again — this time louder.*]

MRS. CADY. Just like one big family.

GLADYS [*singing and swaying to the tune*]. Oh, they're playing "The Frog's Party." [*To* NEIL.] Come on and dance!

NEIL. I'm sorry, but I don't dance.

GLADYS. Oh, so you don't — but I'm going to make you learn. I know a wonderful teacher. [*Turns to* ALBERT.] Dance, Doctor?

ALBERT. A little.

[GLADYS *and* ALBERT *take a few turns about the room.* MRS. CADY *hums the tune, not knowing the words.*]

CADY. Great song! A man I played golf with yesterday tells me that for the first six months of the fiscal year that song'll make a hundred thousand dollars. Write something like that and you're fixed. That's music.

HOMER. We got it on the radio last night.

ALBERT [*politely*]. You don't say?

GLADYS [*near the piano*]. Oh, Neil! [*The three remaining* CADYS *are grouped with* ALBERT.]

[*Simultaneously*]

GLADYS [*holds up a piece of music, as* NEIL *crosses to her.*] What's this?

NEIL. Just something I'm working on.

GLADYS [*sotto voce*]. I want to talk to you.

NEIL. Oh!

GLADYS. Don't you want to talk to me?

NEIL. Oh, yes.

GLADYS. Neil.

[*Points to a small photograph on piano.*]

NEIL. Yes?

GLADYS [*takes up the picture*]. Can I have one of these?

NEIL. I'm afraid I haven't got another.

GLADYS. This was in the Musical Courier, wasn't it?

NEIL. Why, yes.

GLADYS. I saw it. You're pretty well known, Neil. I'm proud of you. I wish I could have this one. Only I wish it were of you alone, instead of you and this other girl, whoever she is.

[*Puts picture back.*]

NEIL. It's just a girl I met one summer. [*A pause.*]

GLADYS. Neil?

NEIL. Well?

GLADYS. Do you like me better than you do Miss Mason?

NEIL. Well, I think she's awfully nice.

GLADYS. Don't you think I'm nice, too?

NEIL. Yes, of course.

GLADYS. Because, I think *you* are. You know that, don't you, Neil?

NEIL [*nearly choking*]. I'm — glad.

GLADYS. So, of course, I want *you* to think *I* am.

NEIL. I — do.

GLADYS [*suddenly*]. Oh! That reminds me. [*Fishes in her handbag.*]

NEIL. What is it?

GLADYS [*bringing out four or five small samples of colored cloths*]. I knew I wanted to ask you something. Which do you like best?

NEIL. Why, they're all very nice.

GLADYS. But don't you like one best?

NEIL. I don't know. They're all sort of — ah — why —

GLADYS. Because I'd like to get the one you'd like. [NEIL *is puzzled. She spreads the samples on his arm.*] They're samples, silly! I'm going from her to the dressmaker's to pick one out.

NEIL. Oh, I see. [*He removes the samples.*]

GLADYS [*pouting*]. Of course if you don't care what I wear, why, all right.

NEIL [*not enthusiastic*]. I do care.

GLADYS [*eager again*]. Well, which one would you rather see me in? The blue?

NEIL. Yes, that would be nice.

GLADYS. I like the pink one myself.

CADY. Couple of hundred miles away, wasn't it?

HOMER. Three hundred.

CADY. Think of that!

ALBERT. It's wonderful.

MRS. CADY. I was going to ask you, Doctor, if you're related to those other Rices. There were two daughters, I think.

ALBERT. No, I haven't any relatives left, there.

CADY. Live in New York now, I suppose?

ALBERT. No, Chicago. I'm just here for a flying visit.

CADY. Chicago? Don't say? Well, that's a good town.

HOMER. Chicago a good town? Huh!

MRS. CADY. It would be nice if you could come up and see us, too, Doctor.

ALBERT. Thank you, but I'm going, back soon.

MRS. CADY. Well, do come if you can. Any day after Thursday. Both our butlers are leaving, and I can't get any new ones to come until after the holiday. But we always like to have people from Livingston drop in. I always say if you don't keep in touch with your old home town, why your old home town won't keep in touch with you.

HOMER. I never want to go back there.

CADY. Well, I don't know as I do either.

MRS. CADY. Listen to that man. And to think he was president of the Board of Trade there for five mortal years.

CADY [*thoughtfully, to* ALBERT]. You know, I think I've got you placed now. Was your father E. J. Rice in the lumber business?

ALBERT. No, he was an architect.

MRS. CADY. An architect — you don't say? Put up buildings, did he?

ALBERT. Yes, a few.

MRS. CADY. Put up any buildings in Livingston?

ALBERT. Why, yes.

CADY. Not the First National?

ALBERT. No, he designed the Mechanics' Building, right next door.

CADY. You don't say?

MRS. CADY. Well, that's a nice building, too.

HOMER. I remember it.

MRS. CADY. Mr. Cady had his offices in the First National Building.

ALBERT. Is that so?

CADY. I guess there's been quite a building boom since you were there. That whole block is pretty solid now.

ALBERT. Really?

MRS. CADY. My, yes. You wouldn't know the place.

CADY. Yes, sir! I guess there's been a good many million dollars invested there in the last five years.

ALBERT. You don't say?

MRS. CADY. Mr. Cady put up a building himself.

ALBERT. That so?

CADY. Just a warehouse. Of course we still have a plant there —

HOMER [*heard by himself*]. It's half past, pop. [*Rises.*]

MRS. CADY. Ready, Gladys? [*Rises.*]

GLADYS. Yes, mama.

[*Starts, then turns back to* NEIL.]

[*Simultaneously.*]

GLADYS [*suddenly, to* NEIL]. Oh, Neil!

NEIL. Yes?

GLADYS. I won't go home for dinner — if you don't want me to.

NEIL. Well, I did sort of think I'd do some work —

GLADYS. I'll go with *you* to a new restaurant I just heard about! I'll tell you what! I'll only be at the dressmaker's a few minutes. Then you can meet me.

NEIL. Well, I don't know exactly how I'll be fixed.

GLADYS. I'll telephone you the minute I'm finished.

NEIL. But, Gladys, I'm going to be tied up, I'm afraid, and —

GLADYS. Well, anyway, I'll phone.

MRS. CADY. Well, now, don't forget, Doctor! Come and see us, if you can.

ALBERT. Thank you.

CADY. Or have a round of golf with me some time. Play golf?

ALBERT. I'm sorry, I don't.

CADY. I remember — I asked you before.

HOMER [*impatient*]. Oh, come on!

MRS. CADY. Just a second, Homer. Gladys is talking.

HOMER. She's always talking.

MRS. CADY [*to* ALBERT, *with a laugh*]. Just like a brother, isn't he?

CADY. Well, goodbye, Doctor.

ALBERT. Goodbye, Mr. Cady.

CADY. Come on Gladys.

GLADYS. All right. [*To* NEIL.] I'll telephone you from the dressmaker's when I'm through.

MRS. CADY. And, Neil — you're coming Tuesday, remember.

NEIL. Oh, thanks. I'm sorry I couldn't have had a nicer party for you.

MRS. CADY. It was elegant. Only next time we come, you must play something for us.

NEIL. I'll ring for the elevator.

MRS. CADY. Oh, that's nice. Come on, Homer.

[NEIL, MR. CADY *and* MRS. CADY *pass into the hall.*]

GLADYS. Goodbye, Doctor.

ALBERT. Goodbye, Miss Cady.

[GLADYS *follows them out;* HOMER *lingers with the Doctor.*]

HOMER. What about him? Do you know him well?

[*He takes out a box of powders.*]

ALBERT. Who? Neil?

HOMER. Yeh. Is he all right?

ALBERT. Why?

HOMER. Well, I just like to know things about a possible brother-in-law.

ALBERT. I see.

HOMER. Gladys is nutty about him. Thinks he's artistic, my God! And did you hear the old man? Just because his father was John McRae!

[*Puts the powder on his tongue — takes a glass of water.*]

MRS. CADY [*in the hall*]. Hurry, Homer!

HOMER [*calling*]. All right! [*He swallows the words, drinking at the same time.*] So long. Well, I hope it don't happen. [*He strolls out.*]

ALBERT. So long.

[*The voices of the departing guests are heard in the hall. Neil returns; looks back into the hall.*]

NEIL. What was all that about?

ALBERT. Oh, nothing in particular.

NEIL. How did you like the Cadys?

ALBERT. They seem to be all right. They must be richer than mud. Did you hear Mrs. Cady on her "butlers"?

NEIL. No.

ALBERT. I never heard of anybody having more than one butler before, but the Cadys seem to have 'em in pairs.

NEIL [*laughing*]. I haven't been to their house yet. I'm going next week, though. [*His glance going to the door.*] Say! Homer's a dirty dog, isn't he?

ALBERT [*thoughtfully*]. Neil, I want to talk to you.

NEIL. Good Lord, again?

ALBERT. In the first place, I want you to go to bed.

NEIL. At half past five o'clock?

ALBERT. You haven't slept for days.

NEIL. But I can't go to bed now. I've got work to do. [*A second's pause.*] You don't mean I'm sick?

ALBERT. No, but you need rest. I want you to put on your dressing gown and lie down for a while. And then take another one of these.

[*Produces the pills.*]

NEIL. But I can't afford to go to sleep. I told you that. I've got work to do.

ALBERT. You can't work tonight.

NEIL. I must.

ALBERT. On those orchestrations?

NEIL. Yes. [*A pause.*]

ALBERT. Neil.

NEIL. What?

ALBERT. I want to talk to you about something else.

NEIL. Good heavens!

ALBERT. All right, but—somebody has to. [NEIL *looks up, sensing something important.*] What are you going to do about your work?

NEIL. Huh?

ALBERT. Your real work, I mean. How much have you done since I went away?

NEIL. Well, what you heard. And Miss Mason and I are working out a little pantomime together. It's going to be a lot of fun—

ALBERT. How much of it is written?

NEIL. A lot. About half, I guess.

ALBERT. About half a movement of a symphony and about half a pantomime.

NEIL. I still have to eat.

ALBERT. But Neil, don't you see—you're wasting your genius!

NEIL. Genius, my hat!

ALBERT. You're wasting the best years you'll ever have doing odd jobs just to keep alive. You've got to be free to write.

NEIL. Well, maybe some day I'll write a popular song and make a million.

ALBERT. If you ever did you'd either burn it or sell it for ten dollars. You'll never make any money, Neil. You know that as well as I do.

NEIL. Then what's the answer? Are you going to subsidize me?

ALBERT. I wish to God I could! But there's no reason why you shouldn't subsidize yourself.

NEIL. What do you mean?

ALBERT. I mean the Cadys.

NEIL. What are you talking—Oh, don't be foolish!

ALBERT. Why is it foolish?

NEIL. Gladys would never—why, you're crazy!

ALBERT. Am I? Think back. How did she behave this afternoon? And Papa Cady? "Nice little share in the business?" And—well, I know what I'm talking about.

NEIL. You mean you're seriously advising me to ask Gladys Cady to marry me?

ALBERT. That's exactly what I'm doing. She's a nice girl, and pretty. You'd have comfort and money and time—

NEIL [*interrupting, with growing excitement*]. Well, what about *me?* Do you think money and music and time would make up for everything else? No, sir! I'd rather keep on living right here—just as I am now—all my life long.

ALBERT. Now, now! Don't get temperamental! If you'll just—

[CYNTHIA *opens the door.*]

CYNTHIA. May a poor girl call for her dishes?

NEIL. I'm sorry—I should have brought them over.

CYNTHIA [*detecting a note in his voice*]. Neil, there's nothing the matter?

ALBERT. I've been trying to persuade him to rest. [*To* NEIL.] Won't you go in and—get ready?

NEIL. I—I can't now.

CYNTHIA. Neil, please. [*A pause.*]

NEIL. All right. But don't go away. I want to talk to you.

[*He goes into the bedroom.*]

CYNTHIA. He *is* difficult.

ALBERT. Yes, he is.

CYNTHIA. I'm glad you've taken charge of him.

[*She is collecting the tea dishes.*]

ALBERT. He'll be all right. Just needs sleep, that's all. I'm not worrying about him physically so much as—well, spiritually.

CYNTHIA. I know. I've been worrying about it for weeks.

ALBERT. You do see his genius, don't you?

CYNTHIA. Oh, yes! He has it, if anyone ever had.

ALBERT. And this hack-work — it must be killing his spirit.

CYNTHIA. When I think of his keeping on, year after year. And he's such a babe-in-arms about practical things. He *does* so need — [*She hesitates.*] We must do something, mustn't we?

ALBERT. Yes, we must. [*A pause.*] There *is* a possible way out, you know. [*A pause.*]

CYNTHIA [*slowly*]. Yes, I know. [*A longer pause.*]

ALBERT. It's the only way, I'm afraid.

CYNTHIA. Oh, I've been thinking about it ever since she began coming here! You really *do* think it's the right thing for him? The wisest?

ALBERT. I'm sure of it.

CYNTHIA. But could he be happy?

ALBERT. That's the only way he *can* be happy, permanently — if he's free to write his music. That's the most important thing in the end.

CYNTHIA. It seems — and yet I'm afraid you're right.

ALBERT. We only hurt people by being sentimental about them. That's one of the first things a doctor learns. Let's put this through. Will you?

CYNTHIA. Oh, I couldn't!

ALBERT. You can do more than I can. You'll be here, and I've got to go away. And anyway, a woman can always do more than a man about this sort of thing. [*Holds out his hand to her.*] For Neil's sake. [*He takes a step away from her as he hears* NEIL *returning.* NEIL *comes back, wearing a dressing gown.*] That's right! Now!

NEIL. Of all the rot! Putting a grown man to bed at half past five!

ALBERT. Who ever accused you of being a grown man? Here! [*Produces a pill.*] Be brave. One swallow and it's over.

NEIL. Oh, all right — give it to me.

ALBERT. Here! [NEIL *takes it.*] And another before you go to bed. I'll put them here. [*He takes up his hat.*]

NEIL. You're going?

ALBERT. Got to — dining uptown. [*Taps* NEIL *lightly with his gloves as he passes.*] I'll look in in the morning. You'll be all right then. Good night, Miss Mason.

CYNTHIA. Goodbye, Doctor.

[ALBERT *goes.*]

NEIL [*To* CYNTHIA, *who is gathering the last of her dishes*]. He's been talking to you about me, hasn't he?

CYNTHIA. Why — you and other things. [*Not looking up.*]

NEIL. What did he say?

CYNTHIA. Don't you wish you knew — curiosity!

NEIL. I *do* know. I know exactly. He said the same thing to me. He said I was a failure — practically. That I'd have to depend on other people all my life.

CYNTHIA. Neil, you're just exciting yourself. You're tired, and you know he wants you to —

NEIL. No, wait! We've got to talk about this, you and I. He said more than that. He said that I ought to ask Gladys Cady to marry me. [*A pause.*] Well! You don't seem — surprised.

CYNTHIA. No, I'm not.

NEIL. Don't you even think it's — funny, a little bit?

CYNTHIA. No.

NEIL. Cynthia! [*Looks at her for a moment and then with a cry.*] Oh, Cynthia — dear! [*Takes her hand.*]

CYNTHIA. Don't, Neil! — *Please* don't!

NEIL. But Cynthia, don't you know — without my telling you — that I love only you and no one else?

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil, please! [*Then, with an attempt at lightness.*] This is so sudden!

NEIL [*hurt*]. Oh, Cynthia, please don't!

CYNTHIA. Oh, please don't *you!*

NEIL. You know I love you, Cynthia! Of course you know; you couldn't help knowing! I thought maybe you — don't you, at all, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA [*regaining control of herself*]. Neil, let me tell you something. I *have* seen that you were growing to care for me, and I've — I've tried to

think what I ought to do about it.

NEIL. Do about it! What can you do about it if—

CYNTHIA. You can do lots of things—if you're practical and sensible.

NEIL. Oh, my dear!

CYNTHIA. I said to myself, I think he's beginning to care about me more than he ought to, considering how we're both situated, and that nothing could come of it. And if I stay here I mightn't be sensible either. So, I'm going away.

NEIL. What!

CYNTHIA. I'm going to move uptown and live with Helen Noland. I'm going tomorrow.

NEIL. Cynthia—do you mean that you don't care about me at all?

CYNTHIA. Oh, yes, I do, Neil. I care about you very much. I think you're a great artist.

NEIL. Artist!

[*He turns away from her.*]

CYNTHIA. And I think it would be the greatest possible misfortune for your music for you to go on this way, living from hand to mouth. So—when Dr. Rice suggested that you marry Miss Cady, it seemed to me a very sensible thing to do.

NEIL [*facing her again*]. Cynthia—do you know what you're talking about?

CYNTHIA. Perfectly.

NEIL. You can't mean that music or no music I ought to marry Gladys.

CYNTHIA. I think you ought to do just that for the sake of your music.

NEIL [*hurt*]. Oh! You're like Albert! You think my music is the only thing about me that's worth while!

[*He again turns away.*]

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil!

NEIL [*continuing*]. It never *was* me that you cared about—only the music.

CYNTHIA. I want you to be happy, Neil.

NEIL [*laughs mirthlessly*]. I certainly got it all wrong, didn't I? [*A pause.*] Well, goodbye, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil! Don't say goodbye like that.

NEIL. What other way is there? You're all being so sensible and practical. I might as well be practical and sensible too. [CYNTHIA *starts to speak, chokes up, goes out—stifling her tears. After a moment* NEIL *turns and sees that she is gone.*] My music! [*Then, less viciously.*] My music! [*The phone bell rings.* NEIL *looks towards it—plainly,* GLADYS *has finished at the dressmaker's. For a second he hesitates; then he makes up his mind and strides to the phone. There is grim determination in his voice, from the opening greeting.*] Hello, Gladys!

GLADYS [*over the phone*]. Hello, Neil!

NEIL. Well, is the fitting over?

[*He stifles a yawn; the pills are beginning to work.*]

GLADYS. Yes, but it wasn't a fitting.

NEIL. Well, whatever it was.

GLADYS. I took the pink one.

NEIL. The pink one. That's fine.

GLADYS. Oh, you don't care which at all!

NEIL. Of course I care which.

GLADYS. Can you meet me?

NEIL. Well, I don't think I can do that.

GLADYS. What?

NEIL. I say I can't go out. The doctor says I must stay in for a while.

GLADYS. Oh, my goodness! Are you sick?

NEIL. Oh, no. Just tired. Really, that's all. I have to—sleep for about an hour.

[*He is growing momentarily more listless.*]

GLADYS. Oh, dear!

NEIL. Well, why don't you come up here instead?

GLADYS. Shall I?

NEIL. Of course.

GLADYS. Why?

NEIL. Well, there's something I want to say to you, to ask you—something we all want to—I mean something I want to ask you—

GLADY. I wish I knew!

NEIL. Maybe you do know. We thought—that is, I thought—how

would you like to marry a great composer?

[*The receiver nearly falls from his grip.*]

GLADYS. Oh, darling! Do you mean it?

NEIL. Sure I mean it.

GLADYS. Of course I'll marry you!

NEIL. Would you, honestly?

GLADYS. Yes, indeed!

NEIL. Well, that's fine. We'll show them, won't we?

GLADYS. Who?

NEIL. Oh, everybody.

GLADYS. Can I tell them?

NEIL. Yes, tell them all. Homer and—

GLADYS. Oh, darling, I'm so happy!

NEIL [*his tone dull*]. Well, I'm happy, too.

GLADYS. Let me hear you say "Sweetheart."

NEIL. Do I have to say it?

GLADYS. Of course.

NEIL [*barely audible*]. Sweetheart.

GLADYS. Go ahead.

NEIL. Didn't you hear it?

GLADYS. No.

NEIL [*viciously*]. Sweetheart!

GLADYS. Do you love me?

NEIL. Of course I do.

GLADYS. Well, I'll come over in about an hour.

NEIL [*a sleepy pause*]. In about an hour. You come, and—I'll sleep for an hour. I'll—sleep. [*He tries to replace the receiver, but is too sleepy. It dangles from its cord.* NEIL *rouses himself from the chair with difficulty.*] And that's that! [*Across the street the jazz orchestra begins again to play "The Frog's Party." It seems louder than before—already* NEIL'S *imagination is using it to swell. He wheels toward the window.*] Now go ahead and play! [*He staggers to the easy chair and drops into it.*] Play the wedding march, damn you! Play the wedding march! [*The tune resolves itself into a jazzy version of Lohengrin's Wedding March. At the same time* NEIL *finally collapses into the chair, and the lights of the room begin to go down. As it grows dark the music swells. Then, after a moment, it begins to grow light again—but it is no longer* NEIL'S *room. It is a railway station, with the arch of Track 37 prominently visible, and other arches flanking it at the side. A muddled train schedule is printed on the station walls, with strange towns that never existed.* NEIL'S *piano, however, has remained where it was, and so has his easy chair. Then, down the aisles of the lighted theatre, there comes suddenly a double wedding procession. One section is headed by* MR. CADY *and* GLADYS—MR. CADY *in golf knickers and socks, knitted vest, and frock coat, with a silk hat prominently on his arm.* GLADYS *is the gorgeously attired bride, bearing proudly a bouquet that consists entirely of banknotes. Behind them stream four ushers—spats, frock coats, and high hats, to say nothing of huge bridal veils, draped over their heads. If you could peer beneath their veils, however, you would find that all four of them look just alike. The procession that comes down the other aisle is headed by* MRS. CADY *and* HOMER. MRS. CADY *wears a grotesque exaggeration of the dress that* NEIL *has seen her in, and* HOMER'S *yellow tie has assumed tremendous proportions. Behind* MRS. CADY *and* HOMER *are four bandsmen. Like the ushers, they all look alike, all wearing bridal veils, through which they play their instruments. At the foot of the stage the processions halt; the music stops.* ALBERT *appears from nowhere in particular; he has turned into a minister.*]

GLADYS. Oh, Neil!

NEIL [*in his sleep*]. Huh?

[ALBERT *gently rouses him.*]

ALBERT. Neil! Did you forget that you were being married today?

NEIL. Oh! Why—I'm afraid I did. [*He looks wonderingly at the railway station, then turns and sees* GLADYS.] Oh, hello, Gladys! I'm sorry.

[*The two processions stream up onto the stage. The ushers and the bandsmen line up behind the* CADY *family.*]

GLADYS. Neil, I want you to meet my ushers. They're all boys I used to know pretty well. [*As* GLADYS *begins the introductions the entire thing turns into a rhythmic chant, to an orchestral accompaniment.*] This is Alf and this is Georgie.

NEIL. Glad to meet you!

ALF. Glad to meet you!

GLADYS. This is Steve.

NEIL. I'm glad to meet you!

GLADYS. This is Fatty.

NEIL. How d'you do?

GLADYS. This is Lou.

LOU. I'm glad to meet you!

NEIL. Glad to meet you!

LOU. Glad to meet you!

GLADYS. And this last is Cousin Harry.

HARRY. Glad to meet you!

NEIL. How d'you do?

CADY. Hurry up, now! Let's get at it!

ALBERT. Take this man to be your husband?

[*A trainman, in uniform, enters through the gates of the railway station.*]

TRAINMAN. Wolverine, for Monte Carlo!

ALBERT. Have and hold him . . .

GLADYS. Yes, I do!

[*They all begin to rise and fall on their toes, to the beat of the music.*]

ALBERT. All your worldly goods and chattels. . . .

[*A trainboy, carrying the usual magazines, chocolates, etc., comes through the gates.*]

TRAINBOY. Latest magazines and papers!

MRS. CADY. Going off to leave her mama!

HOMER. Say, it's cold here! Ah, kerchoo!

[*The ushers begin to march around* GLADYS *and* NEIL, *faster and faster.*]

CADY. Train pulls out in just a minute!

ALBERT. Both for richer and for richer. . . .

TRAINMAN. Pasadena, Paris, London!

ALBERT. Better, worser . . .

GLADYS. Sure I will!

CADY. Special car Appolinaris!

[GLADYS *is kissing the ushers as they march.*]

TRAINBOY. Nothing sold after the train leaves!

MRS. CADY. Don't know *what* I'll do without her!

TRAINMAN. Show your tickets!

HOMER. Ma, keep still!

CADY. Get aboard! I'll tip the preacher!

TRAINMAN. Right this way, please! Right this way, please!

TRAINBOY. Huyler's chocolates and bon-bons!

MRS. CADY. Oh, my baby!

HOMER. Oh, good Lord!

TRAINMAN. Lenox, Palm Beach, Narragansett!

ALBERT. I pronounce you—got the ring, Neil?

ALL THE USHERS. Bet he's lost it! Bet he's lost it!

GLADYS. Here's another!

TRAINMAN. All aboard!

[*The procession starts through the gates—*ALBERT *and* CADY *first, then the rest of the* CADYS, *then the ushers and the bandsmen. As they all file through the ushers continue the chant, calling out in unison:*]

Well, goodbye! Congratulations!
Goodbye, Gladys! Goodbye, Gladys!
Send us back a picture postal!
Hope you're happy!
Well, goodbye!

[GLADYS *tosses her bouquet back to them; the ushers scramble for the banknotes. As the last of the procession disappears through the doors the lights die down. A moment later they come up again, revealing a row of white marble columns, with crimson curtains hung between them.* NEIL'S *piano, however, is still*

incongruously in the left corner, and his easy chair stands at the right. Immediately NEIL *and* GLADYS *enter through side curtains.* NEIL *is still wearing his bathrobe — a somewhat sad spectacle amid all this grandeur.* GLADYS *is no longer in bridal costume, but wears a pleated dress — an exaggeration of the dress that she has worn in real life, with great pleats several inches thick.*]

GLADYS. We're married, Neil!

NEIL. Yes.

GLADYS. I'm your little bride.

NEIL. My little bride.

GLADYS [*giggles*]. Isn't it all just too wonderful? [*Runs into his arms.*] This is our beautiful home — see! [*The curtains behind the front columns part, revealing a magnificent interior consisting entirely of more marble columns and velvet curtains.*] You're going to have everything you've always needed! Mama and papa both say so!

NEIL. Oh! Do they?

GLADYS. Yes, indeed! You just wait — they'll be here any minute!

NEIL. They're coming here?

GLADYS. Of course they are! There're a lot of people coming — all coming to see our beautiful new home! Wait a minute — I'll show you! [*Calls.*] Butlers! [*Two butlers appear. They are exactly alike.*] Announce somebody!

THE TWO BUTLERS. Mrs. Cady and her chair and knitting!

[MRS. CADY *enters with a rocking chair attached to her. She begins knitting immediately. The two butlers depart.*]

MRS. CADY. Two little lovebirds! Gladys and Neil! Gladys and Neil! Are they happy? Oh, my dear, you never *saw* anyone so happy! I was saying to Mr. Cady, "Well, Mr. Cady, what do you think of your little daughter now? [*She sits.*] How's this for a happy family?" And Mr. Cady says to me, "Well, I never would have believed it." And I says to Mr. Cady, and Mr. Cady says to me, and I says to Mr. Cady, and Mr. Cady says to me, and I says —

NEIL. Stop! [MRS. CADY *stops.*] So — so you're my wife's mother?

GLADYS. Why, of course she is! I think she's a pretty nice mother-in-law, don't you? Most people don't like their mothers-in-law, but I think *she's* pretty nice.

NEIL. But is *she* going to be — always —

GLADYS. Yes, indeed! Won't it be lovely? And that isn't all! [*Calls.*] Butlers! [*Four butlers enter.*]

THE FOUR BUTLERS. Mr. Cady, her father!

[MR. CADY *enters. He is in complete golf attire, and there is a telephone attached to his chest. As he enters the butlers depart.*]

CADY [*into the telephone*]. Yep! Yep! Hullo! Well, I'll tell you what to do! Sell eighteen holes and buy all the water hazards. Yep! Yep! Hullo! Well, I'll tell you what to do! I expect caddies will go up any time now. How's the eighth hole this morning? Uh-huh. Well, sell it in three. Yes, sir. That's fine. Yep! Yep! Hullo! Well, I'll tell you what to do! Buy —

NEIL. No, no! [CADY *stops; looks at* NEIL.] You must stop — both of you! Do you know me?

CADY. My son! My new son! Well, Neil, how's the nice music and everything? Making a lot of money?

NEIL. Are we all going to live together?

GLADYS. Yes, indeed, darling.

CADY. Yes, indeed.

MRS. CADY. Yes, indeed.

GLADYS. And that isn't all. [*Six butlers enter. Of course they are all alike.*] I've *another* surprise for you!

THE SIX BUTLERS. Her brother, Homer. He makes me sick.

FIRST BUTLER. I don't think *he's* sick at all.

[*The butlers go.* HOMER *enters — the yellow tie is bigger than ever.*]

HOMER. Oh, there you are, you dirty dog! I'm on to you! You married her

just because Dad's got a lot of money, and you think you're going to have a cinch. But if you think you're going to get all of Dad's money, you're mistaken, because I'm going to get my share and don't you forget it.

[*He makes straight for the easy chair, sits in it, and sneezes.*]

MRS. CADY. Now, Homer! Homer's sick.

CADY. Yes, he's sick.

GLADYS. It's all right, dearest.

NEIL. It isn't all right. I don't want the money. All I want to do is write my music. That's what I want to do—work. Do you think I'll be able to?

GLADYS. Why, of course you will, dear. We've just had this whole room done over for you to work in.

MRS. CADY. It's awfully pretty, Neil.

CADY. Cost a lot of money, too. [*His phone rings.*] Hello! . . . No—wrong number! [*He hangs up.*]

GLADYS. Don't you just love it, Neil, keeping house together? Say "sweetheart!"

NEIL [*automatically*]. Sweetheart.

GLADYS. And next week we're going to have everything done over in some *other* color. Here are the samples—the samples. [*She produces another set of samples, larger than those used in real life.*] Now which color would you like? It's going to be whichever color you like.

NEIL. Why, any one.

[*He removes the samples from his arm.*]

HOMER. Make him pick one! Make him pick it!

GLADYS. Here, I'll tell you! You stop in and get them matched! Get some of this one, and some of that one, and maybe some of the other one—on your way home from business tomorrow. It'll give you something to do.

NEIL. Am I going to business tomorrow?

CADY. Yes, sir! Start right in at the bottom and work up. Learn all the ins and outs. Lots of people think the ins and outs don't amount to anything; but you can't get anywhere in business without them.

NEIL. But if I have to go to business tomorrow I'd like to work on my symphony now—if you'll only go.

HOMER. Huh! The symphony!

GLADYS. That old thing!

CADY. That's no good!

MRS. CADY. I wouldn't have it in the house!

NEIL. But it is good—and I've got to finish it.

CADY. Highbrow music—that's what is it.

NEIL. Well, then, I'll work on the pantomime—that's not so highbrow.

[*He goes to the piano.*]

MRS. CADY. For my part I like hymns. There's nothing like the old familiar hymns.

[*She sings—"Oh, Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."*]

GLADYS. Anyhow, you can't work now. It's tea time!

MRS. CADY [*to the tune of the hymn*]. Yes, tea time! It's tea time! It's tea time!

CADY. So it is. [*Into his phone.*] Hello! . . . Don't disturb me now—I'm busy. . . . Tea!

GLADYS. Quite a crowd coming this afternoon.

MRS. CADY. Yes, coming to meet Neil! Yes, Gladys and Neil! Gladys and Neil!

GLADYS. Now, Neil, you be nice to everybody. I want you to make a nice impression. [*Eight butlers enter.*]

THE EIGHT BUTLERS. A friend of her family's.

[*The butlers go. No one enters, but apparently the* CADYS *see someone. They greet the invisible guest.*]

GLADYS. How do you do?

CADY. How do you do?

[*They bring her down to* MRS. CADY.]

MRS. CADY. How do you do? Oh, what a nice new ear trumpet!

GLADYS. I'm so glad you were able to come!

[NEIL *peers, trying his best to see what it is all about.*]

MRS. CADY. Well, it's wonderful to see you again!

GLADYS. Doesn't she look well, mama?

MRS. CADY. You're the picture of health! No one would ever say *you*

had an operation. I say — no one would ever say you had an operation. Yes, it always does it if you were heavy before. Oh, was it a year ago? Well, tempus does fugit, as Homer says. You remember Homer?

HOMER. I said hello.

MRS. CADY. Homer's sick.

GLADYS. Oh, Neil! I want you to meet an old friend of mama's. She's deaf. You'll have to talk loud.

[*Ten butlers enter.*]

THE TEN BUTLERS. Another friend of the family's! [*The butlers go.*]

GLADYS [*greeting the newcomer*]. How do you do?

CADY. How do you do?

GLADYS. So glad to see you again. And little Hattie! Oh, look, mama!

[CADY *and* GLADYS *bend over, as though greeting a child.*]

MRS. CADY. Why, if it isn't little Hattie! Look, Gladys! Isn't she cunning?

GLADYS. Isn't she? Those cute little curls! Do you want to meet your great big cousin Neilie? Neil, darling, this is your little cousin Hattie. Isn't she a big girl? Say something cute to her.

[GLADYS *turns away from* NEIL *and he passes his foot over the spot where the child is supposed to be.*]

[*Twelve butlers enter.*]

THE TWELVE BUTLERS. A great many other friends of the family.

FIRST BUTLER. And all pretty terrible, if you ask me. [*They go.*]

CADY. Hello, Alf! You remember Mrs. Cady?

HOMER. Hello, Fatty.

MRS. CADY. How do you do?

CADY. Say, I called you up a couple of times but couldn't get any answer.

GLADYS. Why, how do you do, Alf? I'm awfully glad you were able to come. Oh, Neil! I want you to meet an old friend of papa's. He's known me ever since I was — how high? Yes, but you couldn't lift me now.

[*The invisible guest tries to lift her and fails. She giggles. Butlers enter with imaginary trays.*]

MRS. CADY. And now we'll have some nice tea to drink.

HOMER [*probably to* FATTY]. He married Gladys for her money.

MRS. CADY. And then Neil will play for us.

GLADYS. Oh, hello! Haven't seen you in a long time! No, I guess I wasn't engaged then.

[*It is a Babel. The* CADYS *are all speaking together, moving around and greeting guests.* NEIL *moves through it all, walking through guests, passing his hands through the butlers' trays — bewildered.*]

CADY. Oh, hello, Ralph. I want you to meet my new son-in-law. Neil, this is Mr. Umn.

GLADYS. Oh, have you been out to California? Did it rain much?

CADY. Yes, he's going to be very valuable to me in business, too.

HOMER. I'll bet he's rotten.

CADY. But after all there's nothing like business. It'll all be his when I retire — his and Homer's, his and Homer's. [*Slaps* NEIL *on back.*]

[*The following four speeches are spoken simultaneously.*]

MRS. CADY. Well, Miss Mmmm, you know Mmm, don't you? He's a cousin of John's who knew Francis very well. She's Ted's aunt. Yes. It's such a long time since you've been to see us. Gladys is always saying: "Mama, why is it Mrs. Mmm doesn't come and visit us, or why don't we go out and see her?" and all like that. You know Mrs. Mmm, don't you? You've become very plump, or you've become very thin. You don't mind my not getting up, do you? Mr. Cady always says I'm chairbound. But that's his way of making a joke. He's always making a joke. You know Neil, of course. Would you like to have Neil play for us? Would you like to have Neil play for us? Neil, play for us.

HOMER. Look at him, the dirty dog! He married her for her money all right, but if he thinks he's going to get it he's got another think coming. Pop's going to put him in the business! Huh! He

thinks he's going to get the business, too. Well, I'll show him—the dirty dog! He isn't going to get the business away from me—not while I'm alive and kicking. All because he's a musician. Yes, he thinks he plays the piano. Well—let him play it and see if I care. I dare him to play it. Go on and play for us.

MR. CADY. Well, well, well! You know Judge Mmm of course. Old man, I want you to meet the Judge. Yes, they've got a very beautiful home here. Would you like a cocktail, eh? Yes, sir! Well, Judge, how's everything been going? Say, you know Mr. Mmm, don't you? How are you? How have you been all these years? Have a cocktail—that's the boy. Yes, she's a big girl now. Grown up—married. That's her husband there. That's the one I bought for her. Very talented. I'll get him to play. Neil, we'd like to hear you play. Come on, Neil, play something on the piano.

GLADYS. Oh, how do you do, Aunt Gertrude? You know Willie, of course. Willie, you remember Aunt Gertrude. Aunt Gertrude, you remember Willie. Yes, this is our beautiful home. My husband's very talented. No, you didn't interrupt him a bit. He's awfully glad you came. He wasn't going to do anything this afternoon. Anyway, we always have tea. And if it isn't tea, it's something else. We're always having such a good time, Neil and I. Yes, that's my husband there. He plays the piano beautifully. Shall I get him to play? I think he would if I ask him. Oh, Neil, darling, play something. Please, Neil! Neil, for my sake, you'll play, won't you?

[MR. *and* MRS. CADY, GLADYS *and* HOMER *reach the "Come on and play" lines simultaneously.*]

THE CADYS. Play something for us! Play something for us! Play something for us!

NEIL [*in quiet desperation*]. All right. [*Crosses to piano, seats himself and turns on them.*] I'll play, but I'll play what I want to—and I don't think you'll like it.

[*He plays—music that is soft and flowing, and reminiscent of* CYNTHIA. *The lights fade on the* CADYS *and their reception; the curtain falls. Through the window by the piano comes* CYNTHIA.]

NEIL [*as he continues playing*]. Cynthia! I thought that would bring you—I hoped so.

CYNTHIA. Of course, Neil, dear.

NEIL. Cynthia, it was a mistake! I'm terribly unhappy!

CYNTHIA. I'm so sorry, Neil. Because I want you to be happy, always.

NEIL. But I can't be happy with these people. I should have married you, Cynthia. I wanted to, you remember? But you wouldn't. And now it's too late.

CYNTHIA. Yes, it's too late. And I'm sorry, too.

NEIL. I don't want you to be sorry, Cynthia. I don't want you to regret anything. It was all my own fault.

[NEIL'S *music turns to jazz as he plays.*]

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil, don't let your music do that!

[*She begins to draw back into the window.*]

NEIL [*desperately, as the music becomes more and more jazzy*]. I can't help it! It's these people. I'm trying—but I can't help it. [CYNTHIA'S *image begins to fade.*] No—no! Don't leave me, Cynthia! I need you! Don't leave me with these people! They don't understand! They never can understand!

[*But* CYNTHIA *is gone now.* NEIL *ends the jazz music with a treble crash, and buries his head on the keyboard. Immediately* MR. CADY *enters—his hat on and a morning newspaper in his hand.*]

CADY [*as he passes*]. Hurry up, Neil! Must'nt be late for business. [*An elevator man, the same who was the trainman during the wedding scene, enters from the other side and meets* MR. CADY *at center.*] Good morning, Jerry.

ELEVATOR MAN. Good morning, Mr.

Cady. Express elevator going up! Watch your step!

[Neil *looks up. There is no elevator, but this time even* Neil *is persuaded, and he believes that he sees it. Four business men, all with hats and newspapers, and all looking just alike, enter one at a time and step into the imaginary elevator.*]

Cady [*to the first of them*]. Good morning! Made it in twenty-eight minutes this morning!

First Business Man. Good morning! I got the eight-six this morning!

Second Business Man. Good morning! I missed the seven-forty-three.

Third Business Man. Good morning! I always take the nine-two.

Fourth Business Man. Good morning! I thought you were on the eight-sixteen.

[Neil *gets into the car; the men huddle together.*]

Starter [*clicking his signal*]. All right! Twentieth floor first stop!

Cady. No, sir, I wouldn't sell under a million five! No, sir, a million five! Oh, good morning, Neil!

Neil. Well, I'm starting.

Cady. Good boy, Neil! I want you to meet some of my associates. This is my son-in-law, gentlemen. Just bought him for my daughter. Mr. Canoo, statistical department.

First Business Man. Four out!

[*As* Mr. Cady *thus introduces him the* First Business Man *walks out of the elevator, and goes off, paying no attention to* Neil, *who nods at his retreating back.*]

Cady. Mr. Deloo, traffic department.

Second Business Man. Five out!

[*He goes.*]

Cady. Mr. Meloo, tax department!

Third Business Man. Six out!

[*He goes.*]

Cady. Mr. Beloo, general department.

Fourth Business Man. Eight out.

[*He goes.*]

Cady. Well, well, Neil, starting in to work? You'll like it. You'll learn the ins and outs in no time. Hey! Wait a minute. I said nine out!

[*He goes.*]

Neil. Excuse me, Jerry! Can you tell me where I can learn the Ins and Outs?

Starter. Ins and Outs Department! Room three hundred and thirty-three and one-third. Try and find it.

[*He goes.*]

Neil. Thank you.

[*The curtains between the marble columns at right part. A small office is disclosed.* Miss Hey, *a stenographer, is typing at a small desk behind a railing.*]

Neil. I beg your pardon?

Miss Hey. Well?

Neil. I want a pencil.

Miss Hey [*still typing*]. What is it?

Neil. I want a pencil.

Miss Hey. Who sent you?

Neil. I don't know. But I have to have a pencil. I worked in a place like this once before. I had a great deal of difficulty getting a pencil then, I remember.

Miss Hey. It's just as hard to get one here.

Neil. I thought it would be. I suppose there's a lot of red tape to go through.

Miss Hey [*turning toward him*]. Yes. Now as I understand it, you want a pencil.

Neil. That's right.

Miss Hey. Of course you've filled out a requisition.

Neil. No, I haven't. A piece of paper, isn't it? [*She hands him a tremendous sheet of paper. It is about twenty by thirty inches. He studies it.*] What I want is a pencil. There's a place for that to be put in, I suppose?

Miss Hey [*wearily*]. Yes — where it says: "The undersigned wishes a pencil to do some work with." How old are you?

Neil. Thirty-two.

Miss Hey [*taking the paper away*]. That's the wrong form. [*She gives him another — a blue one this time.*] Parents living?

Neil. No.

MISS HEY. What did you do with your last pencil?

NEIL. I didn't have any.

MISS HEY. Did you have any before that?

NEIL. I don't think I ever had any. [*He indicates the form.*] Is that all right?

MISS HEY. It isn't as regular as we like, but I guess it'll do.

NEIL. What do I do now? Go to someone else, don't I?

MISS HEY. Oh, yes. Sometimes you travel for days.

NEIL. Are we all crazy?

MISS HEY. Yes [*she resumes typing*]. You might try Room E — right down the corridor.

[*The curtains close over her, and the curtains at the left simultaneously open, revealing another office, just like the first. Another stenographer,* MISS YOU, *is at work on a typewriter.* NEIL *approaches her, requisition in hand.*]

NEIL. Is this Room E?

MISS YOU [*mechanically*]. Did you have an appointment?

NEIL. No — you don't understand. I'm trying to get a pencil.

MISS YOU. Well, what do you want to see him about?

NEIL [*handing over the requisition*]. It's this. Somebody has to sign it.

MISS YOU [*takes requisition*]. Oh! [*Looks at it.*] Mr. Bippy! The man is here to see about getting a pencil or something.

NEIL. It *is* a pencil.

MISS YOU. Did you see Mr. Schlink?

NEIL. Yes.

MISS YOU. Mr. Woodge?

NEIL. Yes.

MISS YOU. Mr. Meglup?

NEIL. Yes.

MISS YOU. What did *they* say?

NEIL. Why, they seemed to think it would be all right.

MISS YOU [*calls again*]. Oh, Mr. Bippy! [*To* NEIL.] Belong to the Employes' Mutual?

NEIL. Oh, yes.

MISS YOU. Cady Golf and Building Fund?

NEIL. Yes.

MISS YOU. Well — all right.

[*She stamps the requisition with an elaborate machine, which rings a bell as it works. She hands the paper back to* NEIL.]

NEIL. Oh, thanks. Do I get a pencil now?

MISS YOU. Oh, no! It has to be O.K.'d by the President. All requisitions have to be O.K.'d by the President.

NEIL. Is he around here some place?

MISS YOU. Oh, no! He's in a big office. Just keep going until you find a great big office.

NEIL. Where?

MISS YOU. Oh, somewhere in the new building. Mr. Bippy!

[NEIL *turns away. The curtains close.*]

NEIL. The new building. A big office.

[*The center curtains open, revealing a larger office.* MR. CADY, *seated at a long table, is dictating, in alternate sentences, to* MISS YOU, MISS HEY, *and to a dictaphone which stands before him.*]

[NEIL *tries to attract* MISS HEY'S *attention.*]

[*Simultaneously.*]

NEIL [*to* MISS YOU]. I beg your pardon. . . . [*To* MISS HEY.] I beg your pardon . . . would you mind if I — is this the President's office? Excuse me . . . Excuse me.

MISS HEY [*to* NEIL]. Well, what is it?

NEIL I want to see the President.

MISS HEY. What do you want to see him about?

CADY [*dictating*]. And so beg to state — yours of the 19th instant — hoping to receive your valued order — yours received and would say — our Mr. Mmmm will call on you — in re our No. 2160 — yours sincerely — annual sales convention — beg to state — beg to state — beg to state — pursuant to your instructions of the 13th ultimo — F.O.B. our factory — beg to state — beg to state — beg to state — as per your terms and

specifications — would say — would say —

[*By this time, hearing* NEIL'S *voice,* CADY *turns.*]

CADY. Why, Neil!

NEIL. Here I am — at work!

CADY. Yes, sir! Business! Big business!

NEIL. Yes. Big business. What business are we in?

CADY. Widgets. We're in the widget business.

NEIL. The widget business?

CADY. Yes, sir! I suppose I'm the biggest manufacturer in the world of overhead and underground A-erial widgets. Miss You!

MISS YOU. Yes, sir.

CADY. Let's hear what our business was during the first six months of the fiscal year. [*To* NEIL.] The annual report.

MISS YOU [*reading*]. "The turnover in the widget industry last year was greater than ever. If placed alongside the Woolworth Building it would stretch to the moon. The operating expenses alone would furnish every man, woman and child in the United States, China and similar places with enough to last for eighteen and one-half years, if laid end to end."

CADY. How's that?

NEIL. It's wonderful!

CADY. And wait for September 17th!

NEIL. Why?

CADY. That's to be National Widget Week! The whole country!

NEIL. That's fine, but what I came up about —

CADY. Never mind that now — we've got more important things. Conferences, mostly. [*To* MISS HEY *and* MISS YOU.] Any good conferences on for today?

MISS HEY AND MISS YOU [*together*]. One at 3:19 this afternoon.

[*They go.*]

CADY. That's fine! Ever been to a conference, Neil?

NEIL. No, but I've heard a lot about them.

CADY. They're great! You make speeches and decide things, and nobody can get in while they're going on.

[MISS YOU *and* MISS HEY *re-enter excitedly.*]

MISS YOU AND MISS HEY. All ready! They're going to start the conference, the conference, the conference!

[*They rush out.*]

CADY. Fine! Come right in, gentlemen!

[*Half a dozen business men enter. They wear clothes that suggest fatness and prosperity. They walk in stiffly, in a line, repeating the phrases "Overhead," "Turnover," "Annual Report," "Overhead," "Turnover," "Annual Report." They sit, in stiff poses.*]

We are going to have a conference! [*Calls off.*] Bolt the doors, out there! Gentlemen — this is our annual quarterly meeting.

[*He drops a gold piece in front of each man.*]

I want to introduce a young man who has been showing great promise in our factory. I don't know what he will have to say to you —

NEIL. I know what to say! [*Rises.*] I remember now — I know exactly what to say!

CADY. Gentlemen, Mr. Neil McRae!

[*As* NEIL *rises to speak the men all fall into mechanical positions, reminiscent of the board of directors pictures in the advertisements.* NEIL *pounds the table occasionally during his speech, but there is no sound.*]

NEIL. I know you must be surprised to see so young a man stand up before you, but I have *trained* myself to occupy the position I am now in. I have learned my facts. That is how I happen to own my own home. It simply took up my spare time in the evenings. Then, one day, the head of the factory came through the room where I happened to be working on a very difficult piece of machinery. "Who is that?" he asked the foreman. "He seems to be brighter than the others." "Not at all," answered the foreman. "He has simply applied

himself and I think we must raise his pay, if we want to hold him." A few weeks later I was able to solve in five minutes a problem that had puzzled the best brains in our organization. I am now the head of my department, and my old foreman is working under me.

[NEIL *sits; there is applause; the men lean over and shake his hand, congratulating him.*]

BUSINESS MEN. Wonderful! Wonderful!

CADY. I knew he could do it! Gentlemen, he has saved us millions!

FIRST BUSINESS MAN. Why, he is going to be the biggest man in the organization.

OTHERS. Yes! The very biggest!

FIRST BUSINESS MAN. What do you say to signing up with us for ten years at half a million dollars a year?

SECOND BUSINESS MAN. And becoming sales manager?

CADY. How about a bonus?

FIRST BUSINESS MAN. Yes, a bonus!

SECOND BUSINESS MAN. Here's my check for one hundred thousand dollars!

CADY. And here's mine! Two hundred thousand dollars.

FIRST BUSINESS MAN. And mine for one hundred thousand!

OTHER BUSINESS MEN. And mine—one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!

NEIL. Oh, thank you, thank you!

[*He looks at the checks; they are of various-colored paper—pink, blue, yellow.*]

It's an awful lot of money, isn't it?

CADY. A million dollars!

NEIL. A million dollars!

CADY. Well, gentlemen, that was a dandy conference!

FIRST BUSINESS MAN. And mine for best!

CADY. Let's have another!

SECOND BUSINESS MAN. Yes, another.

[CADY *hands out gold pieces again as the curtains close in.* NEIL, *however, has stepped out of the scene and stands facing the audience. Curtains fall behind him.*]

NEIL. Just think, a million dollars.

[*He looks at the checks in his hand but they have turned into samples of colored cloth.*]

Blue and pink and yellow. Blue and yellow and pink. I was to match them *I* know! I was to match them for—

GLADYS [*heard in the distance*]. Oh Neil!

NEIL. For Gladys! [*Then, mechanically.*] Sweetheart!

[GLADYS, *resplendent in evening dress and wrap, joins him.*]

GLADYS. Did you have a hard day at the office, Neil?

NEIL. Here they are. It's a million dollars—I think.

GLADYS. Oh, good. I always knew you'd be a big success, Neil.

NEIL [*dully*]. But I'm not doing what I want to do. My music—I want to write my music.

GLADYS. Oh, not now! It's time to go somewhere! We're going to dance

NEIL. No, no! I've got to write my music. I want to go home now!

GLADYS. Oh, nobody ever goes home We're going to go and dance!

NEIL. But we've got to eat dinner first!

GLADYS. Of course! We're going to eat right here!

NEIL. In this restaurant again? But we were here last night, and the night before. You don't want to come here every night, do you?

GLADYS. Why, of course I do! Suppose it *is* expensive, you can afford it now! And nobody comes here but the best people! We'll come here every night from now on! They have the nicest little lamps on the tables!

[*A check-room boy enters from one side and a headwaiter from the other. A second glance reveals the fact that the headwaiter is* ALBERT. *The check boy takes* GLADYS'S *wrap and* NEIL'S *bathrobe.*]

ALBERT. Bon soir. [*Hold up two fingers.*] How many, please?

NEIL. Two.

ALBERT. Two?

NEIL [*counts them*]. Two.

ALBERT. Two?

NEIL. Why, hello, Albert!

ALBERT. Hello, Neil!

NEIL. Oh, yes! You were a waiter at college, weren't you? You know Gladys?

GLADYS. Of course.

[ALBERT *and* GLADYS *shake hands. Then* ALBERT *immediately becomes again the formal waiter.*]

ALBERT. How many, please?

NEIL. Two.

ALBERT. Two?

NEIL [*looks around to see if a third has myteriously appeared*]. Yes — two.

ALBERT. I will see if I can find you a table. [*He consults his chart.*] All our reserved tables are reserved.

[*The center curtains part, revealing a gaudy cabaret interior. In the center, at the rear, is a window, set in a frame of wrought iron. There is a single table, set with much fancy glassware and two table lamps of the sort so dear to* GLADYS'S *heart. As this scene is revealed an unseen orchestra strikes up the jazz tune, "The Frog's Party."*]

Ah! Right this way, please! Here is nice one — right by the window!

[*He seats them with an elaborate flourish, simultaneously uttering the meaningless ritual of headwaiters everywhere.*]

Yes, Madame! Yes, sir!

[*A cigarette girl, Spanish in attire, enters and circles around the table.*]

GIRL. Cigars and cigarettes! Cigars nd cigarettes!

[ALBERT *presents the menu, a huge affair, to* NEIL.]

GLADYS. See, Neil? Isn't it wonderful? [*She sways to the music.*] Order! e's waiting! Hurry up — you've got order!

NEIL [*scanning the card*]. I — I can't ecide right away.

GLADYS. Oh, that music! I can't and it any longer! [*She rises and izes* ALBERT.] Dance?

[*She whirls around the table with him, to the accompaniment of the jazz tune and the cigarette girl's chorus of "cigars, cigarettes."*]

ALBERT [*when the dance is over*]. Perhaps Madame would care for some Bordelaise à la Bordelaise, or some Bordelaise à la Bordelaise, or some Bordelaise à la Bordelaise.

GLADYS. Why, yes — I'd like that!

ALBERT. And what will Monsieur have?

NEIL [*studying card*]. What *is* Bordelaise à la Bordelaise?

ALBERT. Very nice, sir.

NEIL. Yes, I know, but what is it?

ALBERT. It's served in a little round dish — very nice.

NEIL. Can't I find out what it is?

ALBERT. I'll see if anybody knows, sir. [*He turns his back.*]

GLADYS. Neil!

NEIL. Well?

GLADYS. People don't do that — making a scene in a restaurant!

NEIL. I only want to know what it is.

GLADYS. But you must pretend that you *do* know! *That's* the thing!

[ALBERT *turns back to* NEIL.]

ALBERT. I'm sorry, sir — nobody knows.

NEIL. It doesn't matter. I'll take it.

ALBERT. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

[*Four waiters enter, with dishes.*]

GLADYS. Oh, here's dinner!

[*The waiters circle the table, clanking the lids of their dishes as they exhibit the food. They go slowly at first, then faster and faster, in time to the constantly accelerating music.*]

NEIL [*springing up*]. Stop! I can't stand it! [*The waiters halt in their tracks; the music stops.*] Is it going to be like this always?

GLADYS. What?

NEIL. Our life!

[ALBERT *dismisses the waiters.*]

GLADYS. Why, I think it's wonderful! You're going ahead being a big success in papa's office, and every night we'll go out and dance! You'll have to learn!

NEIL. I won't dance! I don't want to dance! I wouldn't ever have had to dance if I hadn't married you! [*It gives him a thought.*] If I hadn't married you —

GLADYS. Well, I don't care whether you dance or not. *I'm* going to! Albert— [*She rises and seizes* ALBERT; *they dance off.*] If you hadn't married me you'd have starved to death—starved to death—starved to death—

[*Her voice dies down in the distance as she and* ALBERT *dance off to the accompaniment of the jazz tune. As* NEIL *starts the next speech the jazz tune slowly changes into the* CYNTHIAN *theme, and at the same time the gaudy cabaret changes into a sunny cottage.*]

NEIL. I don't think so. I might have been poor, but we'd both have work to do. It's a small house, I know, but the sun finds it the first thing every morning. And flowers live longer in our windows than anywhere else, because she cares for them so.

[*The wrought-iron window has turned into a simple thing of chintzes; chintz curtains appear in the doorways, and a box of jonquils take its place at the foot of the window. The table no longer contains restaurant silver and electric lamps, but is simply furnished with a few breakfast things, with a vase of jonquils to keep them company. The place is flooded with sunlight.*]

NEIL [*calling*]. Cynthia!

CYNTHIA. I'm coming!

NEIL. *Are* you coming, or must I use force?

CYNTHIA. It's the toast machine. You sit down and begin.

NEIL. As though I ever begin without you! Besides, I have something beautiful for you. [CYNTHIA *enters, bringing a tray laden with breakfast.*] See what I've done!

CYNTHIA. What?

NEIL. Nothing at all! Merely created an utterly beautiful morning!

CYNTHIA. *You* did? I started it an hour ago.

NEIL. Perhaps; but see those little powder-puff clouds? *They* weren't there ten minutes ago.

CYNTHIA. They *are* nice, darling. I didn't think you were so clever.

NEIL. And wait till you see the sunset I'm planning.

CYNTHIA. You can't beat last night's. What a scarlet!

NEIL. It blushed because we flattered it so. [*A pause.*]

CYNTHIA. Darling.

NEIL. What?

CYNTHIA. A letter.

[*They stare at the envelope corner.*]

NEIL. Didn't you dare open it?

CYNTHIA. No. But let's be brave. [*They hold hands and take a long breath.*] Now—one, two, three! [*They tear the letter open; read it in silence.*] Do you believe it?

[*The voice is ecstatic.*]

NEIL. No! Do you?

CYNTHIA. Darling!

NEIL. Darling!

CYNTHIA. But it *must* be real—it's typewritten.

CYNTHIA AND NEIL [*reading in unison*]. "Your symphony will be played by our orchestra on December the tenth."

NEIL. Darling!

CYNTHIA. Darling! They'll applaud and applaud! You'll have to come out and bow!

NEIL. I won't!

CYNTHIA. You'll have to have a new dress suit!

NEIL. And you'll have to have a new evening dress—yellow chiffon, too. I can do their damned orchestrations now. I can do a hundred of them between now and October.

CYNTHIA. No, you won't!

NEIL. But, my youngest child, we must continue to eat.

CYNTHIA. But, my dear, we're extremely wealthy. Have you seen my new housekeeping book?

NEIL. No.

CYNTHIA. Look! I ruled every one of those columns myself.

NEIL [*rises*]. Oh! Sit down!

CYNTHIA. That's why my middle finger is all red. [NEIL *kisses her finger.*] This is serious. This is finance. Listen! [*Reading from book.*] "To Mrs. Neil McRae—debtor. Ninety-seven dozen eggs from the little red hen at seventy-

nine a dozen — ninety-seven, seventy-nine. Four hundred and forty-six quarts of milk from the little dun cow at sixty-four — four hundred and sixty-four. Thirty-six pots of jonquils sold Mr. Frost, the florist, at thirty-six sixty-six — six sixty-six, sixty-six." And there's the total!

NEIL. But, Cynthia, that can't be right; it's impossible!

CYNTHIA. Add it up for yourself.

NEIL. Sixty-three and eight are forty-two —

CYNTHIA. Neil, you may be one of the minor gods, but you can't add. [*Takes pencil.*] There! Look!

NEIL. But that means —

CYNTHIA. It means we're billionaires, that's all.

NEIL. We have a hundred and seventy-seven dollars and — seventy-seven cents?

CYNTHIA [*nods*]. And we can keep on just as we have been doing.

NEIL. Cynthia, do you suppose *any* two people *ever?* [*He kisses her.*]

CYNTHIA. No, I don't believe *any* two people *ever.*

[*The voice of* GLADYS *comes out of the distance, faintly.*]

GLADYS. Oh, Ne-il!

CYNTHIA. What is it, dear?

NEIL. I thought I heard someone calling.

CYNTHIA. You did that last night at tea time. I'm frightened.

NEIL. You mustn't be — there are no fears in this house.

GLADYS [*louder this time — the same old call*]. Oh, Ne-il!

NEIL. Cynthia, it's calling me!

CYNTHIA. What?

NEIL. I don't know. I must go to it.

[*He steps out of the cottage.*]

CYNTHIA. I'll go along!

[*The voice grows weaker as* GLADYS's *gets stronger.*]

NEIL. You can't, my dear! It's too absurd.

[*The curtains close on the cottage; the jazz begins again.*]

GLADYS. Oh, Ne-il!

CYNTHIA [*faintly*]. O-o-o-h!

NEIL. Yes, what is it?

GLADYS. Oh, Neil!

[GLADYS *enters — so do the check boy, the cigarette girl,* ALBERT, *and the four waiters. They stand in a line with outstretched palms.*]

NEIL. Yes, what is it?

[GLADYS, *as she speaks, dances with each waiter in turn.*]

GLADYS. Come on, sweetheart! We're going home now! Tip the waiters! Tip the waiters!

NEIL. For heaven's sake, stop that dancing!

GLADYS. I should say not! Tip the waiters! Tip them big! Tip them big!

[*She dances off with the last of the waiters.* NEIL *hands out large bundles of money to the waiters, then as he proceeds along the line, he comes suddenly to* ALBERT.]

NEIL. Albert! [*The music stops.*] You got me into this! You've got to tell me how I'm going to get out of it!

ALBERT. What's the matter?

NEIL. I can't stand it! I can't live with Gladys any longer. What am I going to do about her?

ALBERT. Why, that's easy.

NEIL. What do you mean?

ALBERT. Just kill her — that's all.

NEIL. Kill her?

ALBERT. Of course. It's simple and practical.

NEIL. Do you know I never thought of that? I'm not very practical, am I?

ALBERT. No, you're not.

NEIL. Of course, I wouldn't like to do it unless it were absolutely necessary.

ALBERT. Still, it's worth thinking about.

[*He leaves him with this thought.*]

NEIL. Yes, it is.

[*The music starts;* GLADYS *and the waiter dance on again.*]

GLADYS. We're going home now! Tip the waiters! Did you tip them all? We're going home! Mama and papa will be there, and Homer!

[*The waiters are now gone, and the curtains reopen on the Cady home of pillars.* HOMER *is working on a radio set;* MR. CADY *is playing golf with an imaginary ball;* MRS. CADY

rocks, knits and sings. All is pandemonium.]

CADY. Fore! Everybody, fore!

HOMER. I've got the radio fixed! Listen!

RADIO. Stock market reports! Stock market reports! [*Ad infinitum.*]

GLADYS. Oh, Neil! Isn't it nice to be in our own home again?

[*She leaps into his lap.*]

MRS. CADY [*singing*]. "Bringing in the sheaves! Bringing in the sheaves!'

CADY. Give me the niblick! Give me the niblick!

NEIL. I wish you'd all keep still.

GLADYS. What, darling? Wait! Wait! [*Everybody subsides.*] I hear them! The dancing teachers! The dancing teachers! *Now* you'll learn to dance.

NEIL. I won't, I tell you!

GLADYS. Oh, yes, you will! Here they are! The dancing teachers! Come in, dancing teachers! Now you'll learn to dance!

[*Six dancing teachers enter — exquisite gentlemen, one like another.*]

NEIL. Gladys, I won't!

GLADYS. You've got to! Look! Aren't they wonderful? Here he is — my husband! You're to teach him to dance!

LEADER OF THE DANCING TEACHERS. Ah!

[*He circles around* NEIL, *about to pounce.*]

NEIL. Gladys, I warn you! If you go ahead with this, you'll be sorry!

GLADYS. Teach him to dance! Teach him to dance!

LEADER [*advancing upon* NEIL]. You've got to dance! We teach the world to dance! We make it dance. [*He seizes him.*] We've got him.

GLADYS. *Now* you'll learn to dance!

LEADER. Now watch me! One foot out and one foot in! One foot out and one foot in!

GLADYS. He's learning to dance! He's learning to dance!

ALL *the* DANCING TEACHERS [*forcing* NEIL'S *arms, shoulders and feet*]. One foot out and one foot in! One foot out and one foot in! Now your shoulder, now your elbow! Now your shoulder, now your elbow! One foot out and one foot in! One foot out and one foot in. Now your shoulder —

NEIL [*tears himself loose*]. No! No! I tell you! Get out! All of you! [*They fall back.*] Get out, every one of you! I won't learn to dance!

[*They have disappeared.*]

GLADYS. Neil!

NEIL [*The* CADYS *meantime unconcernedly continue their customary occupations, but in subdued tones*]. Thank God! Now I'm going to write!

GLADYS. Neil, do you realize how you're behaving?

NEIL. I do! I won't go on with this any longer! If this is to be our life together then I can't stand it! I won't! That's all — I won't!

GLADYS. Neil! After all I've done for you! After all papa's done for you!

NEIL. Done for me? You've ruined me, that's all! You've given me a lot of money that I didn't want, and you won't let me do the one thing I want to do! Well, now I'm going to write my music! I'm going to finish my symphony!

GLADYS. Oh, no, you're not! [*Crosses quickly to the piano and tears up the manuscript.*] There's your old symphony! Now, what have you to say?

NEIL. You tore it up! It was the only reason I married you, and you tore it up! All right — there's only one thing to do!

[*He takes up the paper knife from the piano — it is about twice the size that it was when the audience last saw it.*]

GLADYS. Neil, Neil! What are you going to do?

NEIL. I'm going to kill you!

[*She stands looking at him, transfixed. He stabs her, and she falls dead.*]

MRS. CADY [*quietly*]. Now you've done it!

NEIL. It was her fault! She killed my work!

MRS. CADY. She was a sweet girl. The police will get you. [*She sings "Bringing in the Sheaves."*]

NEIL. Stop that singing!

MRS. CADY. I won't!

NEIL. And stop that damned knitting!

MRS. CADY. I won't! "Rock of Ages, cleft for me."

[NEIL *stabs her. She dies, falling over backward, chair and all.*]

CADY [*blandly continuing his golf game*]. This is outrageous! The idea of killing a man's daughter and wife! I'm ashamed of you!

NEIL. You're to blame, too! Just as much as the others! Look!

CADY. What is it?

NEIL. *You're* dead, too.

CADY. Oh!

[MR. CADY *dies*].

NEIL. Thank God, they're out of the way! Peace! I can work at last!

THE RADIO. Stock market reports! Stock market reports!

HOMER [*coming from behind the radio machine*]. Is that so? I guess you forgot all about *me*, didn't you?

NEIL. Forget you? Indeed I didn't! Homer, my boy! [*He stabs him;* HOMER *crumples up on the floor.*] I guess that ends that! Free! Free!

HOMER [*sitting up*]. Free nothing! We'll sue you for this, you dirty dog! [*He falls dead again.*]

NEIL. It won't do you any good! Not when they know why I did it! Not when I show them what you killed! Not when I play them my music!

[*Half a dozen newspaper reporters enter. They are dressed alike and look alike; each has a pencil expectantly poised over a piece of paper.*]

THE REPORTERS [*speaking one at a time, as they surround* NEIL]. The Times! The World! The Post! The Globe! The Sun! The News! The Times! The World! The Post! The Globe! The Sun! The News!

NEIL [*indulging in a gesture with the paper knife*]. Gentlemen, this is purely a family affair. I don't think I should say anything at this time, but do come to my trial.

THE REPORTERS [*again speaking one at a time*]. A statement! A statement! A statement! A statement! A statement! A statement!

NEIL. Well, gentlemen, it's a long story.

[*Instantly a dozen newsboys rush down the aisles of the theatre, crying, "Extra! Extra! All about the murders!" The din is terrific. Simultaneously the theatre lights up; the audience turns for a second to look at the newsboys, and in that second the curtain falls. The newsboys pass out copies of The Morning-Evening, containing a full account of the quadruple murder.*]

END OF PART I

PART II

The scene is now a courtroom. Against curtains of black stand three major objects of red — the same red that appeared fitfully in NEIL'S *chintz curtains, and again as draperies for the pillars in the Cady home. Squarely in the center is a block of twelve seats mounted on a platform. They are designed, obviously, for the jury, but instead of being the customary jurors' chairs they are of the kind found in theatres.* NEIL'S *piano and easy chair, of course, remain in their accustomed places. At the right, also vividly red, is the judge's bench, and against it leans a frame of photographs, of the sort that you see in theatre lobbies. The pictures show* MR. CADY *in various costumes and poses. The witness's box is at the left, and beside it a ticket taker's box, presided over by the ubiquitous* JERRY. *Near him is a hat-check boy recognizable as the same youth who took* NEIL'S *robe in the restaurant, and who also sold chocolates during the wedding ceremony. A couple of ushers, girls, stand chatting beside the jury box.* NEIL, *of course, is also present, walking up and down somewhat nervously, and consulting his watch. The jurors are begin-*

ning to arrive as the curtain ascends — three or four are streaming in. To NEIL'S *surprise they all turn out to be dancing teachers.*]

TICKET TAKER [*as the curtain ascends*]. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

[*He takes the tickets of the jurors, returns the stubs, and drops the remainder into his box.*]

CHECK BOY. Check your coat! Check your coat!

1ST JUROR. I guess we're early.

NEIL. Excuse me, but are you some of the jurors?

2ND JUROR. We certainly are.

NEIL. But — but you're dancing teachers, aren't you?

1ST JUROR. Best in the world.

NEIL. Are you going to try me? My music?

1ST JUROR. That's what.

NEIL. But it doesn't seem fair. I'm afraid you'll be prejudiced against something really good.

[*The* SECOND *and* THIRD JURORS *meet and automatically shake hands.*]

2ND JUROR. Hello, Ed!

3RD JUROR. Hello, Ed!

2ND JUROR. Well, you old son-of-a-gun!

3RD JUROR. Well, you old son-of-a-gun!

2ND JUROR. Glad to see you!

3RD JUROR. Glad to see you.

[*They put their hands in their pockets simultaneously.*]

2ND JUROR. Fine! How's every little thing?

3RD JUROR. Fine! How's every little thing?

2ND JUROR. Well, glad I saw you!

3RD JUROR. Well, glad I saw you!

2ND JUROR. Goodbye, Ed!

3RD JUROR. Goodbye, Ed!

1ST JUROR [*at the frame of photographs*]. Say, who's this?

NEIL. That's the judge. It's the opening night of my trial, you know. That's the way he appeared in several famous cases.

2ND JUROR [*joining them and pointing to a picture*]. Oh, yes! That's the way he looked in the Watkins trial. He was terrible good. Did you see it?

[*A fourth juror is shown to a first row seat by an usher.*]

1ST JUROR. No, I was out of town. [*Points to another picture.*] There he is in the Ferguson case! Gosh, he was good in that?

NEIL. Yes, I heard he was.

2ND JUROR. Was he funny?

1ST JUROR. Funny? He had that courtroom roaring half the time.

2ND JUROR. I don't know another judge in the country who can deliver a charge to a jury like he can. Pathos, comedy, everything.

1ST JUROR. They say this will be the best trial he's ever done. I hear they were sold out last Monday.

[*More jurors are entering.*]

TICKET TAKER. Tickets, please!

HAT-CHECK BOY. Coats checked! Check your coat!

[*The* THIRD JUROR *presents his ticket stub to an usher.*]

USHER. Other aisle, please!

[*He crosses to the other side of the jury box and presents the stub to the other usher.*]

USHER. Other aisle, please!

[*He returns to the* FIRST USHER.]

USHER. Right this way!

[*She indicates a seat in the middle of the box.*]

3UD JUROR. Ain't this an aisle seat?

1ST USHER. No, sir. Fourth seat in.

3RD JUROR. After paying all that money to a speculator!

[*He takes his seat in the middle of the back row.*]

4TH JUROR. There ought to be a law against them.

[*Other jurors are being seated.*]

[NEIL, *at the footlights, catches the attention of the orchestra leader.*] Now, the overture to the trial, please.

[*The orchestra plays the overture — a few bars of cheap musical comedy strains, the modulation from one tune to another being most elaborate. As the orchestra plays, more jurors are seated, leaving empty only the seat next the Judge's bench for the foreman, and another in the*

middle of the first row. The jurors look at their programs, talk, adjust opera glasses, etc. As the overture ends, ALBERT *enters, a camera slung over his shoulder.*]

NEIL. Why, hello, Albert!

ALBERT. Hello, Neil!

NEIL. What are you doing here?

ALBERT. I'm covering the trial.

NEIL. "Covering" it? For a newspaper?

ALBERT [*nods*]. I'm a reporter on the Illustrated.

NEIL. Oh, yes! You used to write, didn't you?

ALBERT. I understand they're going to try some of your music?

NEIL. Yes. You'll give it a fair criticism, won't you — in the paper?

ALBERT. In what paper?

NEIL. Why, your paper.

ALBERT. The Illustrated? We don't use any writing. It's an *illustrated* paper. Didn't you ever see it — in the subway?

NEIL. Of course! I remember — just pictures. But how do people know what they are?

ALBERT. Oh, we always have a few simple words, saying what the picture is about. A good many of our subscribers can read, and they tell the others.

[*A* CANDY SELLER *appears. He has the usual tray of chocolates and peppermints seen in the theatres.*]

CANDY SELLER. Chocolates and bonbons! Fresh chocolates and bon-bons! Assorted chocolates!

1ST JUROR [*leaning out of the jury box*]. Here you are.

[*Buys a box of candy.*]

[*The* CANDY SELLER *goes out again. There is a sudden burst of activity in the jury box.*]

NEIL. What's all that?

ALBERT. They are getting ready to elect a foreman for the jury.

[*There is something like a cheer from the jury box. At one end a sign appears reading: JONES FOR FOREMAN. At the other side: SMITH FOR FOREMAN. The* FIRST JUROR *rises to speak. He receives hearty applause.*]

1ST JUROR. Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen of the Fifth Jury District: I don't think anybody here has to be told at this late date that Harry J. Smith, retired, is the logical man for foreman of this grand jury. I guess everybody here knows Mr. Smith's record. You have all known him since childhood. He is an old Eighth Ward boy and will give a jury a business administration.

OTHER JURORS. Hooray!

[*The* FIRST JUROR *sits. The* SECOND JUROR *immediately demands attention.*]

2ND JUROR. Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen of the Fifth Jury District: I don't think anybody here has to be told at this late date that Thomas A. Jones, retired, is the logical man for foreman of this grand jury. I guess everybody here knows Mr. Jones's record. You have all known him since childhood. He is an old Eighth Ward boy and will give the jury a business administration.

VOICE. What about Ireland?

[*There are cries of "Throw him out!"*]

[NEIL *holds up a hand for silence.*]

NEIL. Wait! [*He goes into the witness box.*] Ladies and gentlemen of the Fifth Jury District: I know it is late to be putting forward a new candidate for foreman of this grand jury, but this is my trial, and it is my music that you're going to hear. Both of the candidates now up before you are good dancers, but it is only fair that there should be someone on the jury who knows good music.

JURORS. Hooray!

NEIL. Therefore, when the light on the Times Building swings on tonight, I want it to be a steady red light, which will show that we have elected the Hon. Albert Rice, of Chicago, a man of the people, for the people, and by the people, and the stars and stripes forever in the good old U. S. A.!

JURORS. Hooray!

[*Almost immediately a red light shines across the group, and the or-*

chestra strikes up Sousa's march, "Stars and Stripes." The jurors, cheering, march around the jury box, carrying American flags, banners, noise-makers, etc. There are cries of "Rice Wins! Hoorah for Rice!" ALBERT, *still mindful of the fact that he has been sent to get the news, makes ready his camera and calls on the crowd to halt.*]

ALBERT. Hold it, please!

[*They stop—there is a scurrying to get into the photograph.* ALBERT *snaps them.*]

NEIL. Hold it! [*He takes the camera and* ALBERT *automatically prepares to have his own picture taken. One of the ushers tries to slip into the picture, but* NEIL *waves her aside. He snaps* ALBERT.] Will they be out soon?

ALBERT. Soon? They are out! [*He pulls a copy of the Illustrated from his pocket—a newspaper covered with a front page crowded with photographs, but entirely blank elsewhere.*] I brought one with me.

NEIL. They're on the front page.

ALBERT. Sure! We put everything on the front page. [*He points.*] There's a picture of the judge delivering his charge.

NEIL. But he hasn't delivered it yet.

ALBERT. Well, we have to get things quick. Our readers expect it.

[ALBERT *takes his place in the jury box. The other jurors lean over and shake his hand.*]

NEIL. The Hon. Albert Rice assumes office as thousands cheer.

[*He waits for the cheer—it does not come. He motions to the jury. They clap their hands perfunctorily.*]

ALBERT. Thank you, gentlemen.

TICKET TAKER [*announcing*]. His Honor, the Judge!

[*Everyone rises. The orchestra begins the Soldiers' Chorus from "Faust." The Judge enters. He is* MR. CADY, *his golf suit handsomely covered by an enormous red robe. He also wears an enormous Judge's wig. He throws away all dignity, however, by lifting the skirts of his gown and skipping into view. The music ends on a long note in the brasses, such as attends the finish of an acrobat's trick.* CADY *curtsies toward the jury box in response to unanimous applause, and blows a kiss. He goes up to his chair and holds the picture of a satisfied actor as he waits for another burst of applause to subside.*]

CADY [*at last—to* NEIL]. Got a match?

NEIL. What?

CADY. Got a match?

NEIL. Oh, yes! [*He strikes a match. Although several feet away from the cigar, the cigar lights.* MR. CADY *and jury are about to sit when* NEIL *hisses.*] Look out!

CADY. What is it?

NEIL. That chair. It isn't very strong, you know.

CADY. Oh, I'll be careful.

[*He sits. The jurors sit.*]

TICKET TAKER. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

[*The final juror enters and presents his ticket.*]

CADY. Ladies and gentlemen, I—

NEIL [*noticing the tardy juror*]. Just a minute! He's late. [*To the juror.*] Can't you people ever be on time?

[*The tardy juror gives his seat check to an usher, who starts to lead him to his place, in the middle of the second row, but finds somebody already in it.*]

CADY [*blandly*]. Ladies and gentlemen, I declare the Court—

[*The confusion makes him break off again.*]

USHER [*leaning far over*]. May I see your check, please?

CADY. I declare the Court—

USHER. May I see your check?

JUROR [*searching his pockets*]. I had it here some place. Ah!

[*Gives stub to the* USHER.]

[*The* USHER *examines the ticket stub.*]

USHER. Oh, you belong in the row ahead. This gentleman has a ticket for this seat.

[*People in both rows have to stand*

up while the exchange is made. It is a good deal of trouble, to put it mildly.]

NEIL [*to* CADY]. All right now. I'm sorry.

CADY. I declare the court to be in session. [*There is a round of applause.* CADY *bows.*] The business of the day is the trial of Neil Wadsworth McRae for murder. [*There is more applause.* NEIL *is finally compelled to bow.* CADY *again addresses* NEIL *confidentially.*] Am I right?

NEIL. Yes. And don't forget, I'm going to play my symphony. That was the reason I did it, you know.

CADY. Yes, I remember. [*He is quite conversational.*] Now, the first thing to be done, I should say, is to have the prosecuting attorney make a sort of general charge. [*To* NEIL.] What do you think?

NEIL. I guess that's right. How about it, Albert?

ALBERT [*looking up from his program*]. Yes, that's right.

[NEIL *nods to the* TICKET TAKER.]

TICKET TAKER [*announcing*]. The prosecuting attorney!

[HOMER *enters to the tune of "Tammany." He wears a long black robe. He receives a hearty round of applause, with a few hisses.*]

NEIL. Oh, it's you!

HOMER [*quietly*]. I'll get you now, you dirty dog!

NEIL. I think not.

CADY. Come, come, we can't be all day at this. I've got to get back to the office. Now, just what were these murders all about.

[HOMER *reads from document. As* HOMER *begins to read* USHER *and* CHECK BOY *begin a whispered conversation that soon dominates the scene.*]

[*Simultaneously.*]

HOMER. "On such and such a blank date, the defendant, Neil Wadsworth McRae, did brutally murder, maim, assault, destroy, stab, injure, kill and cause the death of Gladys Virginia Cady, his wife; Mr. Cady, her father; Mrs. Cady, her mother, and Homer Cady, her brother, destroying one and all of the aforesaid Gladys Virginia Cady, his wife; Mr. Cady, her father; Mrs. Cady, her mother, and Homer Cady, her brother — by the use of a large paper knife, of bone manufacture and curious design, a picture of which appeared in the newspapers at the time."

[*Hands the newspaper containing the picture to* CADY.]

USHER. Did you sell much candy?

CHECK BOY. Sure — enough to buy a couple seats for the movies.

USHER. Oh, let's see the one up the street!

CHECK BOY. Oh, that's punk! You always want to see the sad ones.

USHER. I hate comedies.

CHECK BOY. Well, I hate sad ones.

NEIL. Quiet, please; some of us would like to hear the show!

[*They grudgingly leave the room.*]

CADY. Yes, I saw it. A great, big, long one. Exhibit A.

[*He hands it to the foreman.*]

ALBERT. Exhibit A!

[*Passes it to the other jurors.*]

[*The other jurors repeat "Exhibit A," passing the newspaper from one to another.*]

HOMER. Having caused the death of the aforesaid and aforementioned people, I therefore call upon the Court to punish said Neil Wadsworth MacRae in one or two ways prescribed by law — death or hard labor for life, whichever they do in this state.

CADY [*realizing that maybe it's serious after all*]. Oh, no! Is that so?

NEIL [*lightly*]. Just wait!

CADY [*to* HOMER]. Yes. Just wait, please.

1ST JUROR [*leans toward his neighbor, with open program, and reads from it, as though confiding a bit of real news*]. Say, this courtroom, with every seat occupied, can be emptied in less than three minutes.

CADY. Silence in the court!

[*A pause.*]

HOMER. The State rests.

[*He sits in the easy chair and is immediately seized with a fit of coughing.* MRS. CADY *instantly appears behind* HOMER; *she has her knitting, but no chair.*]

MRS. CADY. Are you all right, Homer?

HOMER. I guess so.

MRS. CADY [*to the jury*]. Homer's sick. He was always delicate. But he was a good boy though. When Homer wanted to be he was as good a boy as you'd find in a month of Sundays. There was no reason on earth why Neil shouldn't have allowed him to live, just like a lot of other people are allowed to live.

[*The jurors applaud her.*]

CADY. You are his mother?

MRS. CADY. Yes, sir.

[CADY *shakes her hand, sympathetically.*]

CADY. You were also a victim, I believe?

MRS. CADY. That's right. [CADY *shakes her hand again.*] You heard how he did it? With a paper knife.

CADY. Oh, yes! You see, we're trying him today.

MRS. CADY. For the murders?

CADY. Yes.

MRS. CADY. Oh, I beg your pardon! [*Begins to back away in confusion.*] I wouldn't have intruded, if I'd known.

NEIL. Wait a minute! I'd like to have Mrs. Cady take the stand, please.

MRS. CADY [*flustered*]. Who? Me?

NEIL. If you don't mind.

HOMER. What! Going to make her take the stand? A mother?

[*There are hisses from the jury.*]

NEIL. Over here, please! [*Leads her to the witness box.*] Do you swear to tell the truth — the truth — and — the truth?

MRS. CADY. Yes.

NEIL. You can't tell the truth unless you raise your hand, you know.

MRS. CADY. No?

NEIL. No. [*She puts up her hand.*] You're Mrs. Cady, aren't you?

MRS. CADY. Yes. [*To* MR. CADY.] Is that right, Fred?

CADY. Yes — that's all right.

NEIL [*suddenly wheeling on* MRS. CADY]. Now then. [MRS. CADY *jumps.*] Where were you on Friday, June third?

MRS. CADY. Knitting.

[*She suits the action to the word.*]

NEIL. But you used to sing in the choir, didn't you?

MRS. CADY. Oh, yes. [*Sings.*] "Just as I am, without one plea."

[*The jurors stand and join in.* CADY *stops smoking for a moment and also sings a bar or two.*]

CADY [*suddenly rapping for order*]. Silence in the court!

NEIL [*waves a warning finger at* MRS. CADY, *as though to intimate that another question is about to come*]. Prove an alibi!

HOMER. I object, Your Honor!

CADY. Objection sustained and overruled! [*To* MRS. CADY.] Answer the question!

[NEIL *smiles mockingly at* HOMER.]

MRS. CADY. What was it?

NEIL. Prove an alibi!

MRS. CADY. What kind?

NEIL [*To* CADY]. I didn't know there were different kinds.

CADY. Oh, yes — there are several kinds of alibis.

NEIL. Then prove any kind.

HOMER. Your Honor, I object!

CADY. You object?

HOMER. Yes! [*He goes to* NEIL *and looks sinisterly at him.*] I object to his looks!

NEIL. Why, what's the matter with them?

CADY [*it is apparently a point of great import*]. An objection has been raised to the prisoner's looks. [*Looks at* NEIL *carefully.*] Hm! Have you anything to say?

NEIL. Sir?

CADY [*quite casual*]. Have you anything to say about your looks?

NEIL. Why — I think they're all right.

[*There is a weighty pause.*]

CADY. This is a serious question. [*He removes his wig. The jury breaks out in chatter;* CADY *raps.*] Order, please! Now, the prisoner thinks that his looks are all right.

HOMER. But he can't prove it!

CADY [*to* NEIL]. Can you prove it?

NEIL. Why —

[*Here's an awful situation.*]

CADY. You see, this is a court of law. Everything has to be proved.

NEIL. Well, well — can't the jury tell by looking?

[NEIL *looks toward the jury, which peers at him closely, but is puzzled. The jurors shake their heads, uncertain.*]

CADY. You see, it's illegal for a jury to know anything until it's been instructed. Now, as I understand it, the point is that you think your looks are all right?

NEIL. Yes.

CADY. But you can't prove it?

NEIL [*if he can only have a moment's peace in which to think it over!*]. Oh, Lord! [*One of the jurors is noisily unwrapping a candy box.*] Quiet! Good heavens — how can I think if they're going to — Your Honor, they *must* be quiet!

CADY. Quiet!

THE JUROR. But it's candy!

[*It is a big box full and it is passed up to the Judge.*]

CADY. Oh, really!

[GLADYS *enters in a brilliant dinner gown and an ornate cloak.*]

GLADYS. Oh, candy! [*She crosses to the Judge's stand and begins rifling the box.*] Hello, Neil! I didn't mean to interrupt! I just ran in to get the boys! We're going dancing! [*Some of the jurors rise; one or two even begin climbing over the railing to join her.*] There's a big new place opening tonight and they're going to take me there! Got some money, papa?

CADY. Ten thousand enough?

[*He gives her a handful of bills.*]

GLADYS. Oh, thanks. Come on, boys!

[*The jurors make further gestures toward going.*]

NEIL. No, wait! [*All movement is suspended.*] You mean you want to take — *them* — away with you?

GLADYS. Of course!

NEIL. But — but I'm being tried for the murders. And if you take the jury away —

GLADYS. I'm sorry, Neil, but I couldn't miss the opening, could I? Are you ready?

[*The jurors step toward her.*]

NEIL. No, no! [*Again the jurors halt.* NEIL *appeals to* CADY.] She can't do that, can she?

CADY [*who has been eating so much candy he has had little time for the trial's new aspect.*] What?

NEIL. Take the jury away, right in the middle of things?

CADY [*licking his fingers*]. She can if it's habeas corpus.

NEIL [*not at all sure*]. Well — is it?

CADY [*he licks his fingers*]. It's beginning to look that way.

NEIL. But it isn't fair! They've got to hear my music. I know what I'll do! [*He faces* CADY.] I'll take it to a higher court!

CADY [*just a bit hurt*]. Oh, don't you like this court?

NEIL. It isn't that. It's a good court, I guess, and the people are lovely, but —

CADY. About how high a one would you want?

NEIL. I'd want the highest I could get.

CADY. All right. [JUDGE CADY *slowly goes up in the air, as his stand grows two or three feet higher.*] Is this high enough for you?

NEIL. I guess so. Is this the superior court?

CADY. Oh, yes. Much superior. And more up-to-date. We send out all our verdicts by radio.

NEIL. She can't take them away with her now, can she — in this court?

CADY. Oh, no! You see, in a higher court the lower court is reversed.

NEIL. Good!

[*The jurors resume their old positions.*]

GLADYS. Oh, the devil! Well, then I'll take Albert. He's only the foreman.

[*She grabs* ALBERT *by the hand and leads him out of the courtroom.*]

CADY [*sucks a sticky thumb*]. Well, are the rest of you ready to bring in a verdict? All in favor will say —

NEIL. No, wait! I'm not through — you haven't heard the music yet.

CADY. Oh, that's right! You're going to play for us.

NEIL. Of course. That's why I killed them, you know, on account of the music. I want to prove that I was justified. Listen! [*He goes to the piano.*] You won't blame me when you've heard the music. [*He strikes a chord.*] This is a symphony in C Minor. [*He starts to play. The result is disconnected, meaningless. There is a budding hissing from the jurors.* NEIL, *with a cry, jumps to his feet, holding up the torn sheet of music. He finds it almost impossible to speak.*] She destroyed it! She tore it up, and now I can't play it! Cynthia! Cynthia!

[CYNTHIA *appears at the piano. She is calm and sympathetic, as always.*]

CYNTHIA. Yes, dear?

NEIL. Cynthia, she tore up the symphony! I can't remember it, and they're waiting for me to play!

CYNTHIA. You still have the pantomime, haven't you?

NEIL. Yes.

CYNTHIA. Then play that for them instead. [*She finds the pantomime music.*] They'll think it's better, anyhow.

[*Puts the music before him.*]

NEIL. But it isn't finished.

CYNTHIA. Well, now you *can* finish it.

NEIL. Can I?

CYNTHIA. Of course. It'll be all right, dear — you'll see.

NEIL. You — you think we ought to do it?

CYNTHIA. Of course.

NEIL. All right. [*He faces his inquisitors.*] Ladies and gentlemen, instead of the symphony, we're going to play a little pantomime, called "A Kiss in Xanadu" — written by Cynthia Mason and Neil McRae. We'll need quite a lot of room, so if you don't mind clearing the court — [*The Judge's dais and the witness box disappear. The jury box, too, moves into blackness.*] The scene is the royal palace in Xanadu. It's a night in June — one of those spring nights that you find only in Xanadu. Now, if you're all ready — music! [*The music of the pantomime begins.*] Cynthia, we ought to have a window to show what kind of night it is.

[*In the distance a great open window appears. Beyond a moonlit balustrade are flowers and trees and stars.*]

CYNTHIA. It's coming!

NEIL. Thanks! The scene is the bedchamber of the Prince and Princess. On the right is the bed of the Princess and on the left is the bed of the Prince.

[*Two fairy-tale beds appear from the darkness. They are canopied in pink. Above them are flower-draped testers that rise to golden points.* NEIL *and* CYNTHIA *seat themselves at the piano and the pantomime begins.*]

A LORD OF THE BEDCHAMBER *and a* LADY OF THE BEDCHAMBER *enter and bow to each other ostentatiously. They are followed into the room by two small black pages, carrying tiny bed tables. The one for the Princess' bed bears a small lamp with a dainty shade. The Prince's has a candle and shade, and a small phonograph. As the* LORD *and* LADY *examine the room the pages go out and return with a pillow, which is placed at the foot of the Princess' bed, and a costumer, which is for the convenience of the Prince. The attendants convince themselves there are no intruders under the beds and depart. A clock strikes nine.*

The PRINCESS *enters. She is very beautiful, but very bored. The lovely night lures her to the window. She goes out on the little balcony and sighs. She is a married Princess. She returns to the bedchamber and snappishly commands the* LADY *to undress her. Nothing to do but go to bed! The* LADY *draws the curtains and leaves.*

The PRINCE *enters with his* LORD. *He would like to be a Gay Dog Prince and he twirls his mustache bravely. He, too, would like to find romance again, but here he is — a married*

Prince! A page puts his royal dressing gown and crown on the costumer. The Lord *attaches curlers to the royal mustache and leaves the* Prince. *The* Prince *turns on the phonograph and tries to do his Nightly Dozen. But the night outside distracts him. He goes to the window. It is too much for him. A second attempt to exercise is abandoned. He will go out to Adventure. If he turns the royal dressing gown inside out it should make a rather good disguise. He does so. The lining of the crown makes a serviceable cap. He tiptoes to the other bed. The* Princess *is asleep. He draws the canopy across his own bed and steals out the window.*

Cynthia. But the Princess wants to go adventuring, too. I know! Let's have the moon wake her!

Neil. Yes! Come on, moon! [*The moon obligingly sends its beams across the bed of the Princess.*] Thank you!

The pantomime proceeds. The Princess' *head pops through the draperies. It is such a beautiful night! She observes the closed canopy of her lord's bed. He is asleep — the dull, conventional husband. She goes to the window. What a night! Romance lies out there. She hesitates. She decides. Frightened, but determined, she takes a cover from her bed. An excellent shawl it makes! But something is wrong. She stands undecided, her hands touching her lovely hair. The music stops.*

Neil. We skipped a place here. We've got to disguise the Princess. She mustn't be recognized, either, you know.

Cynthia. Of course not. I have it! Let her put on her lamp-shade for a bonnet!

Neil. And she can use the Prince's candle-shade for a mask!

The music starts again and the Princess *dons the lamp-shade and puts two finger holes through the candle-shade. She is very happy and goes out to the trees and stars. There is darkness — and here we are in a public park in Xanadu. There are a good many flowery bushes to be seen, but they are not noticed by the* Prince, *who sits, depressed, on a park bench, under a street lamp. A* Policeman, *a* Lamplighter *and two small attendants enter on patrol, and sedately go about their business. The* Princess *comes into the park. A man, a romantic-looking man, even if he is masked by that upturned coat collar! A girl, a charming girl, even if she is holding a small mask before her eyes! She skips away, but returns. She drops her handkerchief. She quietly and politely sneezes. He springs to her aid with her handkerchief. She sits beside him on the bench. He plucks a rose from the bush behind them and offers it timidly. She tosses it away. The light in the lamp is much too bright. A mighty puff from the* Prince *and it goes out. But the* Watch *returns. The lamp is relighted. The* Prince *and the* Princess *sit a little closer. He offers another rose. This time she accepts it. But that lamp! He has a permanent solution. He breaks the lamp in two. Masks are not needed in the darkness, but the moon comes up. He waves it away. She kisses him. A clock strikes five. The sun rises. The adventure is over. She runs away. He calls, but she does not answer. He picks up the rose she spurned. His grief is covered by considerate darkness.*

Once more it is the Royal bedchamber. The Princess *creeps into the room and into bed. The* Prince *steals in a moment later. He goes to the* Princess' *bed. Still asleep! He goes to his bed. The clock strikes eight. The* Lord *and* Lady *arrive. The pages fetch a breakfast table. The royal pair are awakened. They sit down to eat. She starts to pour her husband's coffee. Oh, yes, she*

had forgotten! She rises and offers a cheek to be kissed. He mechanically obliges. They sit down again. But they cannot eat. The music of the night is still with them. They steal wistful looks at the window. The PRINCESS *looks at the rose He gave her. The* PRINCE *looks at the one She first refused. The flowers are stealthily put away. The* PRINCE *and the* PRINCESS *unfold their napkins. It is the humdrum life once more.*

[*The curtain falls, slowly. Then slowly, the footlights go down, plunging the auditorium into complete darkness. Immediately we hear the verdict from the vastly Superior Court — sent out, as* JUDGE CADY *had said, by radio. It comes, through magnifiers, from the rear of the auditorium, and takes the form of loud and derisive laughter, punctuated by cries of "Rotten!" "No good!" "Highbrow!" "Terrible!" In the darkness the curtain again rises. Seated cross-legged on* NEIL'S *piano, still in the red wig and with a red light playing on him, is* JUDGE CADY. *As always, he is smoking a cigar.* NEIL *sits facing him on the piano stool.*]

CADY [*to the invisible voices*]. Silence! [*The voices stop.*] Now, was that what you wanted to show us?

NEIL. Yes, sir.

CADY. Well, of course we don't want to hurt your feelings, Neil, but I'm afraid it's a little bit highbrow. Don't you think so?

NEIL. No, sir. Not very.

CADY. Well, I don't think it's what they want. [*To the unseen jurors.*] How about it?

[*A single voice comes over the radio. It says "Rotten!"*]

CADY. Are you ready to bring in a verdict?

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. Yes, I move we bring in a verdict!

SECOND JUROR'S VOICE. I second the motion!

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. It is moved and seconded that we bring in a verdict. Remarks? [*A pause.*] All those in favor say "Aye."

CHORUS OF VOICES. Aye!

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. Opposed — "No?" [*Pause.*] The motion is carried.

CADY. Well, what sort of a verdict do you want to bring in? There are several kinds of verdicts.

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. I move we bring in a verdict of guilty!

SECOND JUROR'S VOICE. I second that motion!

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. It is moved and seconded that we bring in a verdict of guilty. Remarks? All those in favor say "Aye."

CHORUS OF VOICES. Aye!

FIRST JUROR'S VOICE. Opposed — "No?" [*Pause.*] Well, I guess that motion's carried.

CADY. See, Neil? I told you so.

NEIL. Well — well, what are you going to do with me?

CADY. This thing of using the imagination has got to stop. We're going to make you work in the right way. You see, your talents belong to us now, and we're going to use every bit of them. We're going to make you the most wonderful song writer that ever lived.

NEIL. But I can't write that kind of music! You know I can't!

CADY. You can do it by our system. You are sentenced to be at the Cady Consolidated Art Factory at eight o'clock tomorrow morning!

NEIL. Art factory?

CADY. At eight o'clock tomorrow morning!

[*The lights slowly dim and fade out, and instantly there is a burst of noise. Pianos are playing discordantly; there is the sound of machinery in the distance, a voice is singing a jazz tune, and other voices are heard in loud declamation. The lights go up again on a tier of four cells. In the first a man is dictating to a stenographer; in the second* NEIL *is working away at a piano*

while a youth in a belted coat and a straw hat, atilt on his head, sings to the accompaniment of NEIL'S *music; in the third cell an artist works before an easel, and in the fourth a young man is loudly reciting poetry, apparently moved to do so by the posturings of two other youths who are in the cell with him. After a moment of this pandemonium a guide enters, followed by three visitors. All four are dancing teachers, so far as outward appearances go, but they are marked apart by the fact that the guide wears an official-looking cap, and the visitors carry umbrellas and open Baedekers. The guide raises his voice for silence; a gong sounds somewhere, and all activity ceases. The figures in the cages come down to the bars and stand waiting.*]

GUIDE. Now this, gentlemen, is the manufacturing department. In this studio — [*he indicates the first*] — we have Walter Carp Smith, the world's greatest novelist —

NOVELIST [*more or less routine*]. How are you?

GUIDE [*passing to the second cage*]. In this studio, Neil McRae, the world's greatest composer!

NEIL [*listlessly*]. How are you?

GUIDE [*at the third cage*]. In this one, Finley Jamison, the world's greatest magazine artist!

ARTIST. How are you?

GUIDE [*at the fourth cage*]. And in this, James Lee Wrex, the world's greatest poet!

POET. How are you?

GUIDE [*indicating the unseen cages beyond*]. The studios beyond are devoted to science and religion. Mr. Cady has the first person in the world to put religion up in ten-cent packages, selling direct to the consumer.

FIRST VISITOR. You don't say so!

GUIDE. He also prides himself on having the largest output of literature and music in the world. He's going to open two more plants the first of the month. Now, would you like to see how these men work?

FIRST VISITOR. Yes, indeed! [*Goes toward the first cage.*] Did you say this was the novelist?

GUIDE. The world's greatest. Author of more than two thousand published works.

FIRST VISITOR. What an imagination!

GUIDE. Yes, sir, none at all. Now if you're ready, I'll show you how he works. Go!

NOVELIST [*begins at once to dictate from a book in his hand*]. "Something closely resembling a tear fell from the old patrician's cheek. 'Margaret,' he cried, 'the people of the West have learned to love you, too.' 'Jackie boy,' she whispered. 'They have made you governor after all.' Far off on the — the —"

[*He hesitates; the stenographer takes up the story.*]

STENOGRAPHER. "— desert, the caravan faded away. Night took them in its arms and a great hush fell on the forest. The two lovers —"

GUIDE. Stop! [*He turns to the visitors.*] There you are!

FIRST VISITOR. Was *she* writing it?

GUIDE. Oh, no! Sometimes she gets a little ahead of him, that's all.

FIRST VISITOR. Isn't he wonderful!

GUIDE. Forty-five minutes after he finishes a novel we have it printed and assembled and on its way to the movie men.

FIRST VISITOR. May we talk to him?

GUIDE. Certainly.

FIRST VISITOR [*to the novelist*]. I've enjoyed your novels very much.

NOVELIST. Thank you.

FIRST VISITOR. I see you're writing a new one.

NOVELIST. Of course I'm under contract.

FIRST VISITOR. What's that?

[*Indicating the book in the novelist's hand.*]

NOVELIST. It's my last one.

FIRST VISITOR. But weren't you just dictating from it, for your new one?

NOVELIST. Yes. They like it that way.

GUIDE. Under the old system they

wrote it all new each time. Here — let the gentleman have it as a souvenir.

FIRST VISITOR [*reading the title*]. "Eternal Love." What's your new one called?

NOVELIST. "Love Eternal."

GUIDE. Don't forget — you're lecturing at three o'clock at Wanamaker's.

SECOND VISITOR. Say, will you show us how the artist works?

GUIDE. Certainly. What will you have — a cover or an advertisement?

SECOND VISITOR. What's the difference?

GUIDE. There isn't any.

SECOND VISITOR. Well, then, I'll take an advertisement.

GUIDE. All right. Go! [*The Artist draws without looking at the canvas. He hands it to the guide, who hands it to the visitor. The canvas is blank.*] There you are!

SECOND VISITOR. What beautiful eyes!

THIRD VISITOR. Wonderful!

GUIDE. Do you want to talk to him?

SECOND VISITOR. Oh, thanks. I suppose it'll be used on a magazine?

ARTIST. Oh, yes — thousands.

SECOND VISITOR. Must be worth five or six hundred dollars.

ARTIST [*bored to death*]. Thirty-five hundred.

FIRST VISITOR. You don't say so!

GUIDE. And here, gentlemen, is our poet. His "Jolly Jingles" are printed in three million newspapers a day.

FIRST VISITOR [*pointing to the men in back*]. Who are those men?

GUIDE. Those are his models. He is the only poet in the world who works from living models. That's why all his poetry is so true, so human. He'll show you. Go!

POET. I will now write a friendship poem. [*Motions to his models.*] Friendliness No. 3, please. "Friendship."

[*The models strike a pose, hands clasped.*]

[*The poet recites.*]

"Goodbye, old pal; hello, old pal; the greatest pal I ever knew.
A dog's your finest friend, my lad, when all the world is blue."

SECOND VISITOR. Ain't it human?

GUIDE. And here, gentlemen, is Mr Neil McRae, America's foremost composer.

FIRST VISITOR. Who's that in back?

GUIDE. That's his lyric writer. You will now see how they work. What kind of a song will it be, McRae?

NEIL. A pathetic.

[*Sits at the piano.*]

GUIDE. A pathetic. Go!

[NEIL *plays.*]

SINGER [*in a horrible voice*].

"You've broken my heart like you broke my heart,
So why should you break it again?"

[NEIL *comes to the bars again.*]

GUIDE. That will sell one and one-half million.

SECOND VISITOR. I suppose you write other kinds of songs, too?

NEIL. Oh, yes — —mammies, sweeties and fruit songs. The ideas are brought from the inspiration department every hour on the hour. After I turn them into music they are taken to the purifying department, and then to the testing and finishing rooms. They are then packed for shipment.

FIRST VISITOR. A wonderful system!

THIRD VISITOR. I should say so!

SECOND VISITOR. Do you work all the time?

NEIL. No, the night shift comes on at eight.

FIRST VISITOR. How long have you been here?

NEIL. For years and years.

SECOND VISITOR. Say, will you write another song for us — just as a souvenir?

NEIL [*desperately*]. Oh, why don't you all go away?

GUIDE. What's that? What was that? You get busy there and write another song!

NEIL. No! I've been writing forever — I'm tired of it.

GUIDE. Do you want me to call Mr. Cady?

NEIL. I don't care! I don't care what you do!

GUIDE. I'll give you one more chance.

NEIL. No! I won't!

GUIDE. All right, then! Mr. Cady! Mr. Cady!

[*The Guide rushes out. The visitors slink away. A gong sounds. Those in the cages huddle in fear.* MR. CADY *appears behind the cages. He carries a large snake whip.*]

CADY. What's the matter here?

GUIDE. McRae says he won't go on!

CADY. He won't, eh? Well, we'll see about that!

NEIL. I can't go on! I'm tired!

CADY. What's that got to do with it? You've got to go on!

NEIL. I *can't*, I tell you. I *can't* keep on at this sort of thing.

CADY. You know your sentence, don't you? You've got to work our way until you die.

NEIL [*dully*]. Yes, I know.

CADY. We own you now. The family. The family owns you.

[*He falls into rhythmic measure.*]

You take our money and you live our life,
We own you, we own you.
You take our money and you live our life,
We own you, we own you.
You take our money and you live our way,
We pay the piper and we tell him what to play.
You sold your soul and you can't get away,
We own you, we own you.

[*The* CADY *family and others enter at back, and weave back and forth joining in the chant, reaching through the bars at* NEIL.]

NEIL. Until I die! I can be free from you if I die! I *can* die! You can't keep me from it! That's how I can get away from you! Open the door! Open the door!

[*He shakes the door on the audience's side of the cage. It opens.*]

It was never locked! [*He steps out and closes the door.* CYNTHIA *enters.*] Cynthia, Cynthia, I'm free! I can die! [*Those in the background disappear.*] Cynthia, how are we going to do it?

CYNTHIA. We'll go to an executioner. I know a good one. You mustn't be afraid. It won't hurt. [*An Executioner appears masked, with a black robe and a huge paper knife.*] See — it's Jerry!

JERRY. Hello, Mr. McRae.

[*Takes off his mask and cap.*]

NEIL. Oh, hello, Jerry! You're going to do it, are you?

JERRY. Sure.

[*Feels the edge of his knife.*]

NEIL. Oh, that's good.

CYNTHIA. Do we have to wait long?

JERRY. No — you're next.

NEIL. Oughn't we to have a block?

CYNTHIA [*moving the armchair*]. We'll use this. It'll be more comfortable.

NEIL. Oh! And you'll stay with me?

CYNTHIA. Always. [*She stands beside him*]. But it won't hurt. [ALBERT *enters, wearing a short medical apron and jacket.*] Albert will give you a pill.

NEIL. Oh, yes! Hello, Albert!

ALBERT. Hello, Neil! Got a glass of water?

CYNTHIA [*glass of water in hand*]. We're ready, Doctor.

[ALBERT *goes to the chair; tests its strength.*]

ALBERT [*to the Executioner*]. Is the light all right?

[*The cabaret orchestra is heard in the distance.*]

JERRY. I think so.

NEIL. There's that music again.

ALBERT. You're nervous, that's all. Here! [NEIL *swallows a pill.*]

CYNTHIA. Now it can't possibly hurt you.

ALBERT [*motions* NEIL *to the chair*]. Here we are! [NEIL *sits.*] That's it — way back. [*To* JERRY.] Right?

NEIL. Shall I take off my collar?

ALBERT. Oh, no. There's room, I think.

NEIL. Just a once-through, please.

ALBERT. Of course. It'll be all over in a minute.

NEIL. Cynthia!

CYNTHIA. Yes.

NEIL. I was afraid you'd gone.

CYNTHIA. No, dear. [JERRY *taps his knife on floor.*] Are you ready, Neil?

NEIL. Yes, except for that music. Charles the First didn't have any music.

[*The lights begin to fade.*]

CYNTHIA. He's ready, Doctor.

NEIL. Don't go away, Cynthia!

ALBERT. All ready.

[JERRY *taps the knife again on the floor.*]

NEIL. Goodbye! I'll see you soon.

CYNTHIA. Are you comfortable?

NEIL. Yes. You'll be with me always, won't you, Cynthia?

[*There is darkness, save for a cloudy moving light on* NEIL.]

CYNTHIA. Always.

ALBERT. All right.

NEIL. Cynthia, are you there?

CYNTHIA. Yes, darling.

[*There is a hum of voices. Presently one can discern several chanting, "You take our money and you lead our life."* MRS. CADY *is heard saying, "Homer's sick."* MR. CADY *is apparently telephoning somewhere. He is shouting, "Well, I'll tell you what to do!"* HOMER'S *voice repeats, "You dirty dog!"* GLADYS *shrilly calls out, "He's learning to dance!" The voices become a chant, finally unintelligible. The lights slowly go up again. We are back in* NEIL'S *apartment. He is asleep in his chair. It is sunset. There is a knock, a real knock, on the door.*]

NEIL [*half asleep*]. Yes?

[CYNTHIA *enters.*]

CYNTHIA. Is anything the matter, Neil? I thought I heard you talking.

NEIL. It didn't hurt. Was it a success?

CYNTHIA. Neil, are you all right?

NEIL [*takes her hand.*] I need you, Cynthia!

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil, do you? Are you sure you do? I—I couldn't stay away, Neil. I tried to, but I couldn't. Because I need you, too. I just couldn't give you up to anyone else on earth.

NEIL. Cynthia, dear.

CYNTHIA. It wouldn't have worked, Neil—with those people. Don't you know it wouldn't?

NEIL. I think I do.

CYNTHIA. I've been sitting out on a bench in the square, trying to think out what it would mean—what it would do to you.

NEIL. I know. Widgets.

CYNTHIA. That would be worse for you than any amount of poverty.

NEIL. Poverty in our cottage.

CYNTHIA. Did you think of a cottage, too?

NEIL. Of course—I lived there.

CYNTHIA. We could manage. I know quite a lot about raising chickens.

NEIL [*reminiscently*]. A little red hen and a little dun cow.

CYNTHIA. Yes, we might have a cow. Have you been thinking about it, too?

[*Rises.*]

NEIL. Well—let's say dreaming. [*He rises and goes to the desk.*] It was terrible, Cynthia—do you know, I dreamed I was married to *her?*

CYNTHIA. To Gladys?

NEIL. When I thought you didn't care, I was hurt and angry. And I dreamed she telephoned— [*Sees the receiver off the hook.*] My God! Did she telephone! Oh, Cynthia, it's real! I *did* do it! I did!

CYNTHIA. Did what?

NEIL. I did ask her to marry me!

CYNTHIA. Neil! You didn't! And she—accepted you?

NEIL. Yes.

CYNTHIA. Oh, Neil.

[*A knock at the door.* JERRY *puts his head in. He wear a uniform somewhat like the one that accompanied him through the dream.*]

JERRY. It's me, Jerry. I've been ringing your phone for the last five minutes. Yeh, I thought so—you left it off the hook again. [NEIL *replaces receiver.*] The young lady that came before was waiting, so I brought her right up.

GLADYS [*in the doorway*]. It's me, Neil—may I come in? [*Enters.*] Oh, hello again, Miss Mason!

CYNTHIA. I—I forgot my tea things.

[*Half choking, she takes up her tray of tea things.*]

GLADYS. Well, here we are. Isn't it exciting! We're engaged.

NEIL. Yes.

GLADYS. Did you have a good nap?

NEIL. Yes, thank you.

GLADYS [*obviously something on her mind*]. Do you love me a lot, Neil? Enough to do me a great big favor?

NEIL. What?

GLADYS. It's a big one, and maybe you won't want to do it.

NEIL. What is it?

GLADYS. Well, it's this way. Coming back from the dressmaker's I met Walter Craig. I told you about him, didn't I? He's a boy that sort of used to like me.

NEIL. Oh, yes.

GLADYS. Now, mind you, Neil, you can say "No" to this if you want to, but —he said, "What are you doing tonight?" Now, you won't be angry, Neil?

NEIL. No, no.

GLADYS. Well, then he said he didn't know any other girl in New York, and would I sort of play around with him this week. So all I wondered was — well — you know how a fellow is — if he thinks a girl's engaged, why, he won't come near her at all. Now mind, you don't have to do it — and I won't be a bit hurt if you don't, but what I thought was — if we could start being engaged, say, a week from today — you wouldn't mind, would you, Neil? Of course, next week, after we *are* engaged, we'll just go everywhere together.

NEIL. I see.

GLADYS. I know a dozen people, pretty near, that'll give big parties for us. It's an awful lot of fun, being engaged.

NEIL. Is it? I'm afraid I wouldn't fit in with that sort of thing.

GLADYS. Why, half the fun of being engaged is — well —

NEIL. Gladys, just what is your idea of being engaged?

GLADYS. Why — I've just been telling you. [NEIL *smiles.*] What's the matter?

NEIL. Well, it's just that your idea of an engagement is different from mine.

GLADYS. What is yours?

NEIL. I think I'd want to be somewhere alone, just the two of us, where we could talk.

GLADYS. Talk about what?

NEIL [*with a meaning look*]. I don't know.

GLADYS. You don't mean you'd *always* be like that, do you? I mean, when you're married?

NEIL. I might.

GLADYS. Well, where would I come in? Do you mean you'd expect *me* to sit around *every* evening and — just talk? I did think you'd be willing to — play around the way other people do.

NEIL. I see.

GLADYS. But, of course, if you wouldn't — well — why — there doesn't seem to be much sense in our being engaged, does there?

NEIL. It's to be just as you say, Gladys.

GLADYS. Well, I don't think we're exactly suited to each other — if you think it over. Honestly, I don't. Do you?

NEIL. No, Gladys.

GLADYS. I noticed the difference the minute I saw Walter again! I can kind of let myself go with Walter. You're sure you don't think I'm a quitter?

NEIL. I think you're all right.

GLADYS. And we'll still be friends, won't we? I've always thought you were nice, Neil. [*She gives a sigh.*] It's a sort of a relief, isn't it?

NEIL. Yes, it is — rather.

GLADYS. Well, goodbye. I've got to go because I left Walter downstairs.

[*She departs.*]

NEIL. Oh! [*Laughs. Starts to call out.*] Cyn —

[*Looks across the hall, crosses to the piano and begins to play the music of the pantomime.*]

[*After a moment* CYNTHIA *comes slowly into the room.*]

CYNTHIA [*hesitatingly*]. Want me, Neil.

NEIL. Do I want you?

[*He continues playing as he hears her approaching.*]

CURTAIN.

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R. U. R. (Karl Kapek)

QUESTIONS ON "BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK"

1. Alexander Woollcott calls this play "a small and facetious disturbance in the rear of the church of the Gospel of Success." Explain.

2. What features of American life are targets for satire?

3. Is Cynthia's sacrifice in Part I probable?

4. Compare the play in any ways you can with *Success*.

5. Is the satire ever unfair?

6. Explain the title.

EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL

Eugene O'Neill was born in New York City in 1888. His father was James O'Neill, a popular actor of the time, particularly well known for his leading rôle in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. After preparatory years in private schools, young O'Neill entered Princeton in 1906. At the end of his first year he was suspended by university authorities as a result of infraction of certain rules, and he elected not to return after the period of his suspension had elapsed. The open road beckoned too strongly. After an unhappy period with a New York business firm, he set out with a friend to prospect for gold in Honduras. Although he did not find gold, he inaugurated those years of vagabondage that have yielded him a rich harvest in his knowledge of the seamy side of humanity, laborers, seamen, failures; an acquaintance with ships, slums, docks, sanitariums, and also with business houses and business men, the stage, and the New England community; and an intimacy with the sea in its darker moods that makes it more than a background in his earlier plays: it is as much a character in these plays as is Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*.

After recovering from a tropical fever which he contracted in Honduras, he traveled over the United States as assistant manager of *The White Sister* company, in which his father was playing. He found the life too unexciting, however, and after reading Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus* he shipped on a Norwegian bark for Buenos Aires, spending sixty-three days on the voyage from Boston. In the South American city he remained a year and a half with the Westinghouse Electric Company and other firms; but the call of the sea proved irresistible, and he shipped again on a long voyage, this time to Portuguese East Africa and back to the Argentine. He returned on a British tramp to New York, whence he shipped several times as able seaman on the American line. A season on the stage and a period of newspaper reporting preceded the publication of his first plays in 1914. Realizing the imperfections of his first attempts, he enrolled in Professor Baker's drama course at Harvard, spending the school year of 1914-5 in the English 47 Workshop. He lived by the sea in Provincetown, Massachusetts, producing his plays in the little Provincetown theater, not reaching Broadway as a professional playwright until 1920, when his first full length play, *Beyond the Horizon,* won the Pulitzer prize.

Although still a young man, Mr. O'Neill has written more than fifty plays. There has been a steady growth in dramatic power and technique from the conventional early melodramas to the highly original *Lazarus Laughed* and *Strange Interlude*. Without compromising to gain public favor, without theories or interest in propaganda, with a keen knowledge of his audience and a contempt of its tastes, he has become our most popular as well as most distinguished playwright. No American dramatist has received half the acclaim abroad that Eugene O'Neill has. By 1923 his plays were being performed in London, Dublin, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and Prague. On the Continent he ranks with Shaw and Pirandello as the greatest living playwright. He is recognized as being soundly American, in spite of his international appeal, for he is a product of American life and civilization. Spiritual frustration, the tragedy of Eugene O'Neill's protagonists, is seen by many as the peculiar tragedy of a people to whom things of the spirit have only a desultory meaning.

His best plays are *Beyond the Horizon,* the tragedy of a dreamer confined to a hostile environment; *The Hairy Ape,* a semi-impressionistic, ironical study of a primitive individual who tries to "think through" the realities and lies of life; *The Emperor Jones,* story of the negro emperor who is overcome by the Nature he tries to subdue with the civilization he imperfectly understands; *Anna Christie,* embodying the ironic efforts of a bargemaster to save his daughter from his greatest enemy, "The ole davel sea," when she has already been a victim to a more tyrannical master; *Marco Millions,* a satire of the self-engrossed materialist;

and *Strange Interlude,* a nine-act play of epic proportions depicting the life history of three men and a woman of the most confused relationships.

Although *Diff'rent* is not one of his best plays, it is typical of the best and worst of Mr. O'Neill. It is a study of degeneration and distortion of an essentially vulgar woman who, repelled by the realities of life, tries in vain to escape into a shadowy world of ideals and illusions. It is a terrifying study of sex-repression and poisonous inhibitions, revealing at once the influence of Strindberg and of Ibsen. Here is a literary and human interpretation of sex as elucidated by the psychologists and psycho-analysts. For denying the demand of life and Nature, Emma pays the penalty in a manner little short of revolting. The play has been criticized for the great gap between the acts, but the criticism is pointless unless the unity of the play is destroyed. The ending has excited much unfavorable comment; the double suicide to many is a shock and unnecessary. It must be borne in mind, however, that Emma's whole life was a fabric of illusions, and when they were swept entirely away she was helpless to adjust herself to reality; and that Caleb clung with tenacious sentimentality to an ideal Emma who became his whole existence, and whose distortion into the gulled and foolish old woman destroyed forever his interest in life. Of the accusation of bleakness and morbidity repeatedly brought against the tragedy, there is no answer except that the author is writing of life as he has known it, writing with courage and relentless sincerity.

In all his plays his one interest is man, his struggle with the powers without and within him which frustrate him. In social and similar problems he has no interest. Mr. O'Neill himself says: "Life is struggle, often, if not usually, unsuccessful struggle; for most of us have something within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire. And then as we progress, we are always seeing further than we can reach. I suppose that is one reason why I have come to feel so indifferent toward political and social movements of all kinds . . . I can't feel that anything like that really matters. It is rather amusing to see how seriously some people take politics and social questions and how much they expect of them. Life as a whole is changed very little, if at all, as a result of their course. It seems to me, that as far as we can judge, man is much the same creature, with the same primal emotions and ambitions and motives, the same powers and weaknesses, as in the time when the Aryan race started toward Europe from the slopes of the Himalayas. He has become better acquainted with those powers and those weaknesses, and is learning ever so slowly to control them. The Birth-cry of the higher men is almost audible, but they will not come by tinkering with externals or by legislative or social fact. They will come at the command of the imagination or the will."

DIFF'RENT (1920)

BY

EUGENE O'NEILL

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN CALEB WILLIAMS
EMMA CROSBY
CAPTAIN JOHN CROSBY, *her father*
MRS. CROSBY, *her mother*
HARRIET WILLIAMS, *Caleb's sister* (*later* MRS. ROGERS)
ALFRED ROGERS
BENNY ROGERS, *their son*

ACT I: Parlor of the Crosby home on a side street of a seaport village in New England — mid afternoon of a day in late spring in the year 1890.

ACT II: The same. Late afternoon of a day in the early spring of the year 1920.

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DIFF'RENT

ACT I

SCENE.—*Parlor of the* CROSBY *home. The room is small and low-ceilinged. Everything has an aspect of scrupulous neatness. On the left, forward, a stiff plush-covered chair. Farther back, in order, a window looking out on a vegetable garden, a black horsehair sofa, and another window. In the far left corner, an old mahogany chest of drawers. To the right of it, in rear, a window looking out on the front yard. To the right of this window is the front door, reached by a dirt path through the small lawn which separates the house from the street. To the right of door, another window. In the far right corner, a diminutive, old-fashioned piano with a stool in front of it. Near the piano on the right, a door leading to the next room. On this side of the room are also a small bookcase half filled with old volumes, a big open fireplace, and another plush-covered chair. Over the fireplace a mantel with a marble clock and a Rogers group. The walls are papered a brown color. The floor is covered with a dark carpet. In the center of the room there is a clumsy, marble-topped table. On the table, a large china lamp, a bulky Bible with a brass clasp, and several books that look suspiciously like cheap novels. Near the table, three plush-covered chairs, two of which are rockers. Several enlarged photos of strained, stern-looking people in uncomfortable poses are hung on the walls.*

It is mid-afternoon of a fine day in late spring of the year 1890. Bright sunlight streams through the windows on the left. Through the window and the screen door in the rear the fresh green of the lawn and of the elm trees that line the street can be seen. Stiff, white curtains are at all the windows.

As the curtain rises, EMMA CROSBY *and* CALEB WILLIAMS *are discovered.* EMMA *is a slender girl of twenty, rather under the medium height. Her face, in spite of its plain features, gives an impression of prettiness, due to her large, soft blue eyes which have an incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess about them. Her mouth and chin are heavy, full of a self-willed stubbornness. Although her body is slight and thin, there is a quick, nervous vitality about all her movements that reveals an underlying constitution of reserve power and health. She has light brown hair, thick and heavy. She is dressed soberly and neatly in her black Sunday best, style of the period.*

CALEB WILLIAMS *is tall and powerfully built, about thirty. Black hair, keen, dark eyes, face rugged and bronzed, mouth obstinate but good-natured. He, also, is got up in black Sunday best and is uncomfortably self-conscious and stiff therein.*

They are sitting on the horsehair sofa, side by side. His arm is about her waist. She holds one of his big hands in both of hers, her head leaning back against his shoulder, her eyes half closed in a dreamy contentedness. He stares before him rigidly, his whole attitude wooden and fixed as if he were posing for a photograph; yet his eyes are expressively tender and protecting

when he glances down at her diffidently out of the corners without moving his head.

EMMA [*sighing happily*]. Gosh, I wish we could sit this way forever! [*Then after a pause, as he makes no comment except a concurring squeeze.*] Don't you, Caleb?

CALEB [*with another squeeze — emphatically*]. Hell, yes! I'd like it, Emmer.

EMMA [*softly*]. I do wish you wouldn't swear so awful much, Caleb.

CALEB. S'cuse me, Emmer, it jumped out o' my mouth afore I thought. [*Then with a grin.*] You'd ought to be used to that part o' men's wickedness — with your Pa and Jack cussin' about the house all the time.

EMMA [*with a smile*]. Oh, I haven't no strict religious notions about it. I'm hardened in sin so far's they're concerned. Goodness me, how would Ma and me ever have lived in the same house with them two if we wasn't used to it? I don't even notice their cussing no more. And I don't mind hearing it from the other men, either. Being seafaring men, away from their women folks most of the time, I know it just gets to be part of their natures and they ain't responsible. [*Decisively.*] But you're diff'rent. You just got to be diff'rent from the rest.

CALEB [*amused by her seriousness*]. Diff'rent? Ain't I a sea-farin' man, too?

EMMA. You're diff'rent just the same. That's what made me fall in love with you 'stead of any of them. And you've got to stay diff'rent. Promise me, Caleb, that you'll always stay diff'rent from them — even after we're married years and years.

CALEB [*embarrassed*]. Why — I promise to do my best by you, Emmer. You know that, don't ye? On'y don't git the notion in your head I'm any better'n the rest. They're all good men — most of 'em, anyway. Don't tell me, for instance, you think I'm better'n your Pa or Jack — 'cause I ain't. And I don't know as I'd want to be, neither.

EMMA [*excitedly*]. But you got to want to be — when I ask it.

CALEB [*surprised*]. Better'n your Pa?

EMMA [*struggling to convey her meaning*]. Why, Pa's all right. He's a fine man — and Jack's all right, too. I wouldn't hear a bad word about them for anything. And the others are all right in their way, too, I s'pose. Only — don't you see what I mean? — I look on you as diff'rent from all of them. I mean there's things that's all right for them to do that wouldn't be for you — in my mind, anyway.

CALEB [*puzzled and a bit uneasy*]. Sailors ain't plaster saints, Emmer, — not a darn one of 'em ain't!

EMMA [*hurt and disappointed*]. Then you won't promise me to stay diff'rent for my sake?

CALEB [*with rough tenderness*]. Oh hell, Emmer, I'll do any cussed thing in the world you want me to, and you know it!

EMMA [*lovingly*]. Thank you, Caleb. It means a lot to me — more'n you think. And don't you think I'm diff'rent, too — not just the same as all the other girls hereabouts?

CALEB. 'Course you be! Ain't I always said that? You're wo'th the whole pack of 'em put together.

EMMA. Oh, I don't mean I'm any better. I mean I just look at things diff'rent from what they do — getting married, for example, and other things, too. And so I've got it fixed in my head that you and me ought to make a married couple — diff'rent from the rest — not that they ain't all right in their way.

CALEB [*puzzled — uncertainly*]. Was — it's bound to be from your end of it you bein' like you are. But I ain't sure o' mine.

EMMA. Well, I am!

CALEB [*with a grin*]. You got me scared, Emmer. I'm scared you'll want me to live up to one of them high fangled heroes you been readin' about in them books.

[*He indicates the novels on the table.*]

EMMA. No, I don't. I want you to be just like yourself, that's all.

CALEB. That's easy. It ain't hard bein' a plain, ordinary cuss.

EMMA. You are not!

CALEB [*with a laugh*]. Remember, I'm warnin' you, Emmer; and after we're married and you find me out, you can't say I got you under no false pretenses.

EMMA [*laughing*]. I won't. I won't ever need to. [*Then after a pause.*] Just think, it's only two days more before you and me'll be man and wife.

CALEB [*squeezing her*]. Waal, it's about time, ain't it? — after waitin' three years for me to git enough money saved — and us not seein' hide or hair of each other the last two of 'em. [*With a laugh.*] Shows ye what trust I put in you, Emmer, when I kin go off on a two year whalin' vige and leave you all 'lone for all the young fellers in town to make eyes at.

EMMA. But lots and lots of the others does the same thing without thinking nothing about it.

CALEB [*with a laugh*]. Yes, but I'm diff'rent, like you says.

EMMA [*laughing*]. Oh, you're poking fun now.

CALEB [*with a wink*]. And you know as well's me that some o' the others find out some funny things that's been done when they was away.

EMMA [*laughing at first*]. Yes, but you know I'm diff'rent, too. [*Then frowning.*] But don't let's talk about that sort o' ructions. I hate to think of such things — even joking. I ain't like that sort.

CALEB. Thunder, I know you ain't, Emmer. I was on'y jokin'.

EMMA. And I never doubted you them two years; and I won't when you sail away again, neither.

CALEB [*with a twinkle in his eye*]. No, even a woman'd find it hard to git jealous of a whale!

EMMA [*laughing*]. I wasn't thinking of whales, silly! But there's plenty of diversion going on in the ports you touched, if you'd a mind for it.

CALEB. Waal, I didn't have no mind for it, that's sartin. My fust vige as skipper, you don't s'pose I had time for no monkey-shinin', do ye? Why, I was that anxious to bring back your Pa's ship with a fine vige that'd make him piles o' money, I didn't even think of nothin' else.

EMMA. 'Cepting me, I hope?

CALEB. O' course! What was my big aim in doin' it if it wasn't so's we'd git married when I come to home? And then, s'far as ports go, we didn't tech at one the last year — 'ceptin' when that durn tempest blowed us south and we put in at one o' the Islands for water.

EMMA. What island? You never told me nothing about that.

CALEB [*growing suddenly very embarrassed as if some memory occurred to him*]. Ain't nothin' to tell, that's why. Just an island near the Line, that's all. O'ny naked heathen livin' there — brown colored savages that ain't even Christians. [*He gets to his feet abruptly and pulls out his watch.*] Gittin' late, must be. I got to go down to the store and git some things for Harriet afore I forgets 'em.

EMMA [*rising also and putting her hands on his shoulders*]. But you did think of me and miss me all the time you was gone, didn't you? — same as I did you.

CALEB. 'Course I did. Every minute.

EMMA [*nestling closer to him — softly*]. I'm glad of that, Caleb. Well, good-by for a little while.

CALEB. I'll step in again for a spell afore supper — that is, if you want me to.

EMMA. Yes, of course I do, Caleb. Good-by.

[*She lifts her face to his.*]

CALEB. Good-by, Emmer.

[*He kisses her and holds her in his arms for a moment.* JACK *comes up the walk to the screen door. They do not notice his approach.*]

JACK [*peering in and seeing them — in a joking bellow*]. Belay, there!

[*They separate with startled exclamations.* JACK *comes in grinning. He is a hulking, stocky-built young fel-*

low of 25. His heavy face is sunburned, handsome in a coarse, good-natured animal fashion. His small blue eyes twinkle with the unconsciously malicious humor of the born practical joker. He wears high sea-boots turned down from the knee, dirty cotton shirt and pants, and a yellow sou'wester pushed jauntily on the back of his head, revealing his disheveled, curly blond hair. He carries a string of cod heads.]

JACK [*laughing at the embarrassed expression on their faces*]. Caught ye that time, by gum! Go ahead! Kiss her again, Caleb. Don't mind me.

EMMA [*with flurried annoyance*]. You got a head on you just like one of them cod heads you're carrying — that stupid! I should think you'd be ashamed at your age — shouting to scare folks as if you was a little boy.

JACK [*putting his arm about her waist*]. There, kitty, don't git to spittin'. [*Stroking her hair.*] Puss, puss, puss! Nice kitty! [*He laughs.*]

EMMA [*forced to smile — pushing him away*]. Get away! You'll never get sense. Land sakes, what a brother to have!

JACK. Oh, I dunno. I ain't so bad, as brothers go — eh, Caleb?

CALEB [*smiling*]. I reckon you'll do, Jack.

JACK. See there! Listen to Caleb. You got to take his word — love, honor, and *obey*, ye know, Emmer.

EMMA [*laughing*]. Leave it to men folks to stick up for each other, right or wrong.

JACK [*cockily*]. Waal, I'm willin' to leave it to the girls, too. Ask any of 'em you knows if I ain't a jim-dandy to have for a brother.

[*He winks at* CALEB *who grins back at him.*]

EMMA [*with a sniff*]. I reckon you don't play much brother with them — the kind you knows. You may fool 'em into believing you're some pumpkins but they'd change their minds if they had to live in the same house with you playing silly jokes all the time.

JACK [*provokingly*]. A good lot on 'em 'd be on'y too damn glad to git me in the same house — if I was fool enough to git married.

EMMA. "Pride goeth before a fall." But shucks, what's the good paying any attention to you.

[*She smiles at him affectionately.*]

JACK [*exaggeratedly*]. You see, Caleb? See how she misuses me — her lovin' brother. Now you know what you'll be up against for the rest o' your natural days.

CALEB. Don't see no way but what I got to bear it, Jack.

EMMA. Caleb needn't fear. He's diff'rent.

JACK [*with a sudden guffaw*]. Oh, hell, yes! I was forgittin'. Caleb's a Sunday go-to-meetin' Saint, ain't he? Yes, he is!

EMMA [*with real resentment*]. He's better'n what you are, if that's what you mean.

JACK [*with a still louder laugh*]. Ho-ho! Caleb's one o' them goody-goody heroes out o' them story books you're always readin', ain't he?

CALEB [*soberly — a bit disturbed*]. I was tellin' Emmer not to take me that high.

JACK. No use, Caleb. She won't hear of it. She's got her head sot t'other way. You'd ought to heard her argyin' when you was gone about what a parson's pet you was. Butter won't melt in your mouth, no siree! Waal, love is blind — and deaf, too, as the feller says — and I can't argy no more 'cause I got to give Ma these heads. [*He goes to the door on right — then glances back at his sister maliciously and says meaningly.*] You ought to have a talk with Jim Benson, Emmer. Oughtn't she, Caleb?

[*He winks ponderously and goes off laughing uproariously.*]

CALEB [*his face worried and angry*]. Jack's a durn fool at times, Emmer — even if he is your brother. He needs a good lickin'.

EMMA [*staring at him — uneasily*]. What'd he mean about Jim Benson, Caleb?

CALEB [*frowning*]. I don't' know —

ezactly. Makin' up foolishness for a joke, I reckon.

EMMA. You don't know — *exactly?* Then there is — something?

CALEB [*quickly*]. Not as I know on. On'y Jim Benson's one o' them slick jokers, same's Jack; can't keep their mouths shet or mind their own business.

EMMA. Jim Benson was mate with you this last trip, wasn't he?

CALEB. Yes.

EMMA. Didn't him and you get along?

CALEB [*a trifle impatiently*]. 'Course we did. Jim's all right. We got along fust rate. He just can't keep his tongue from waggin', that's all's the matter with him.

EMMA [*uneasily*]. What's it got to wag about? You ain't done nothing wrong, have you?

CALEB. Wrong? No, nothin' a man'd rightly call wrong.

EMMA. Nothing you'd be shamed to tell me?

CALEB [*awkwardly*]. Why — no, Emmer.

EMMA [*pleadingly*]. You'd swear that, Caleb?

CALEB [*hesitating for a second — then firmly*]. Yes, I'd swear. I'd own up to everything fair and square I'd ever done, if it comes to that p'int. I ain't shamed o' anything I ever done, Emmer. On'y — women folks ain't got to know everything, have they?

EMMA [*turning away from him — frightenedly*]. Oh, Caleb!

CALEB [*preoccupied with his own thoughts — going to the door in rear*]. I'll see you later, Emmer. I got to go up street now more'n ever. I want to give that Jim Benson a talkin' to he won't forgit in a hurry — that is, if he's been tellin' tales. Good-by, Emmer.

EMMA [*faintly*]. Good-by, Caleb. *He goes out. She sits in one of the rockers by the table, her face greatly troubled, her manner nervous and uneasy. Finally she makes a decision, goes quickly to the door on the right and calls.*] Jack! Jack!

JACK [*from the kitchen*]. What you want?

EMMA. Come here a minute, will you?

JACK. Jest a second. [*She comes back by the table, fighting to conceal her agitation. After a moment,* JACK *comes in from the right. He has evidently been washing up, for his face is red and shiny, his hair wet and slicked in a part. He looks around for* CALEB.] Where's Caleb?

EMMA. He had to go up street. [*Then coming to the point abruptly — with feigned indifference*]. What's that joke about Jim Benson, Jack? It seemed to get Caleb all riled up.

JACK [*with a chuckle*]. You got to ask Caleb about that, Emmer.

EMMA. I did. He didn't seem to want to own up it was anything.

JACK [*with a laugh*]. 'Course he wouldn't. He don't 'preciate a joke when it's on him.

EMMA. How'd you come to hear of it?

JACK. From Jim. Met him this afternoon and me and him had a long talk. He was tellin' me all 'bout their vige.

EMMA. Then it was on the vige this joke happened?

JACK. Yes. It was when they put in to git water at them South Sea Islands where the tempest blowed 'em.

EMMA. Oh. [*Suspiciously.*] Caleb didn't seem willing to tell me much about their touching there.

JACK [*chuckling*]. 'Course he didn't. Wasn't I sayin' the joke's on him? [*Coming closer to her — in a low, confidential tone, chucklingly.*] We'll fix up a joke on Caleb, Emmer, what d'ye say?

EMMA [*tortured by foreboding — resolved to find out what is back of all this by hook or crook — forcing a smile*]. All right, Jack. I'm willing.

JACK. Then I'll tell you what Jim told me. And you put it up to Caleb, see, and pertend you're madder'n hell. [*Unable to restrain his mirth.*] Ho-ho! It'll git him wild if you do that. On'y I didn't tell ye, mind. You heard it from someone else. I don't want to git Caleb down on me. And you'd hear about it from someone sooner or later 'cause Jim and the rest o' the boys has been tellin' the hull town.

EMMA [*taken aback — frowning*]. So all the town knows about it?

JACK. Yes, and they're all laffin' at Caleb. Oh, it ain't nothin' so out o' the ordinary. Most o' the whalin' men hereabout have run up against it in their time. I've heard Pa and all the others tellin' stories like it out o' their experience. On'y with Caleb it ended up so damn funny! [*He laughs.*] Ho-ho! Jimminy!

EMMA [*in a strained voice*]. Well, ain't you going to tell me?

JACK. I'm comin' to it. Waal, seems like they all went ashore on them islands to git water and the native brown women, all naked a'most, come round to meet 'em same as they always does — wantin' to swap for terbaccer and other tradin' stuff with straw mats and whatever other junk they got. Them brown gals was purty as the devil, Jim says — that is, in their heathen, outlandish way — and the boys got makin' up to 'em; and then, o' course, everything happened like it always does, and even after they'd got all the water they needed aboard, it took 'em a week to round up all hands from where they was foolin' about with them nigger women.

EMMA [*in anguish*]. Yes — but Caleb — he ain't like them others. He's diff'rent.

JACK [*with a sly wink*]. Oho, is he? I'm comin' to Caleb. Waal, seems 's if he kept aboard mindin' his own business and winkin' at what the boys was doin'. And one o' them gals — the purtiest on 'em, Jim says — she kept askin', where's the captain? She wouldn't have nothin' to do with any o' the others. She thought on'y the skipper was good enough for her, I reckon. So one night jest afore they sailed some o' the boys, bein' drunk on native rum they'd stole, planned to put up a joke on Caleb and on that brown gal, too. So they tells her the captain had sent for her and she was to swim right out and git aboard the ship where he was waitin' for her alone. That part of it was true enough 'cause Caleb was alone, all hands havin' deserted, you might say.

EMMA [*letting an involuntary exclamation escape her*]. Oh!

JACK. Waal, that fool brown gal b'lieved 'em and she swum right off tickled to death. What happened between 'em when she got aboard, nobody knows. Some thinks one thing and some another. And I ain't sayin' nothin' 'bout it — [*with a wink*] but I know damn well what I'd 'a done in Caleb's boots and I guess he ain't the cussed old woman you makes him out. But that part of it's got nothin' to do with the joke nohow. The joke's this: that brown gal took an awful shine to Caleb and when she saw the ship was gittin ready to sail she raised ructions, standin on the beach howlin' and screamin', and beatin' her chest with her fists. And when they ups anchors, she dives in the water and swims out after 'em. There's no wind hardly and she kin swim like a fish and catches up to 'em and tries to climb aboard. At fust, Caleb tries to treat her gentle and argy with her to go back. But she won't listen, she gits wilder and wilder, and finally he gits sick of it and has the boys push her off with oars while he goes and hides in the cabin. Even this don't work. She keeps swimmin' round and yellin' for Caleb. And finally they has to p'int a gun at her and shoot in the water near her afore the crazy cuss gives up and swims back to home, howlin' all the time. [*With a chuckle.*] And Caleb lyin' low in the cabin skeered to move out, and all hands splittin' their sides. Gosh, I wish I'd been there! It must have been funnier'n hell! [*He laughs loudly — then noticing his sister's stony expression, stops abruptly.*] What're you pullin' that long face for, Emmer? [*Offendedly.*] Hell, you're a nice one to tell a joke to!

EMMA [*after a pause — forcing the words out slowly*]. Caleb's comin' back here, Jack. I want you to see him for me. I want you to tell him —

JACK. Not me! You got to play this joke on him yourself or it won't work.

EMMA [*tensely*]. This ain't a joke Jack — what I mean. I want you to tell him I've changed my mind and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK. What!

EMMA. I been thinking things over

tell him — and I take back my promise — and he can have back his ring — and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK [*flabbergasted — peering into her face anxiously*]. Say — what the hell — ? Are you tryin' to josh me, Emmer? Or are you gone crazy all of a sudden?

EMMA. I ain't joking nor crazy neither. You tell him what I said.

JACK [*vehemently*]. I will like — Say, what's come over you, anyhow?

EMMA. My eyes are opened, that's all, and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK. Is it — 'count of that joke about Caleb I was tellin' you?

EMMA [*her voice trembling*]. It's 'count of something I got in my own head. What you told only goes to prove I was wrong about it.

JACK [*greatly perturbed now*]. Say, what's the matter? Can't you take a joke? Are you mad at him 'count o' that brown gal?

EMMA. Yes, I am — and I ain't going to marry him and that's all there is to it.

JACK [*argumentatively*]. Jealous of a brown, heathen woman that ain't no better'n a nigger? God sakes, Emmer, I didn't think you was that big a fool. Why, them kind o' women ain't women like you. They don't count like folks. They ain't Christians — nor nothin'!

EMMA. That ain't it. I don't care what they are.

JACK. And it wasn't Caleb anyhow. It was all her fixin'. And how'd you know he had anything to do with her — like that? I ain't said he did. Jim couldn't swear he did neither. And even if he did — what difference does it make? It ain't rightly none o' your business what he does on a vige. He didn't ask her to marry him, did he?

EMMA. I don't care. He'd ought to have acted diff'rent.

JACK. Oh golly, there you go agen makin' a durned creepin'-Jesus out of him! What d'you want to marry, anyhow — a man or a sky-pilot? Caleb's a man, ain't he? — and a damn good man and as smart a skipper as there be in these parts! What more d'you want, anyhow?

EMMA [*violently*]. I want you to shet up! You're too dumb stupid and bad yourself to ever know what I'm thinking.

JACK [*resentfully*]. Go to the devil, then! I'm goin' to tell Ma and sic her onto you. You'll maybe listen to her and git some sense. [*He stamps out, right, while he is speaking.* EMMA *bursts into sobs and throws herself on a chair, covering her face with her hands.* HARRIET WILLIAMS *and* ALFRED ROGERS *come up the path to the door in rear. Peering through the screen and catching sight of* EMMA, HARRIET *calls.*] Emmer!

[EMMA *leaps to her feet and dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief in a vain effort to conceal traces of her tears.* HARRIET *has come in, followed by* ROGERS. CALEB'S *sister is a tall, dark girl of twenty. Her face is plainly homely and yet attracts the eye by a certain boldly-appealing vitality of self-confident youth. She wears an apron and has evidently just come out of the kitchen.* ROGERS *is a husky young fisherman of twenty-four, washed and slicked up in his ill-fitting best.*]

ROGERS. Hello, Emmer.

EMMA [*huskily, trying to force a smile*]. Hello, Harriet. Hello, Alfred. Won't you set?

HARRIET. No, I jest run over from the house a second to see if — Where's Caleb, Emmer?

EMMA. He's gone up street.

HARRIET. And here I be waitin' in the kitchen for him to bring back the things so's I can start his supper. [*With a laugh and a roguish look at* ROGERS.] Dearie me, it ain't no use dependin' on a man to remember nothin' when he's in love.

ROGERS [*putting his arm about her waist and giving her a squeeze — grinning*]. How 'bout me? Ain't I in love and ain't I as reliable as an old hoss?

HARRIET. Oh, you! You're the worst of 'em all.

ROGERS. You don't think so.

[*He tries to kiss her.*]

HARRIET. Stop it. Ain't you got no manners? What'll Emmer think?

ROGERS. Emmer can't throw stones. Her and Caleb is worser at spoonin' than what we are.

[HARRIET *breaks away from him laughingly and goes to* EMMA.]

HARRIET [*suddenly noticing the expression of misery on* EMMA'S *face—astonished*]. Why, Emmer Crosby, what's the matter? You look as if you'd lost your last friend.

EMMA [*trying to smile*]. Nothing. It's nothing.

HARRIET. It is, too! Why, I do believe you've been crying!

EMMA. No, I ain't.

HARRIET. You have, too! [*Putting her arms about* EMMA.] Goodness, what's happened? You and Caleb ain't had a spat, have you, with your weddin' only two days off?

EMMA [*with quick resentful resolution*]. There ain't going to be any wedding.

HARRIET. What!

ROGERS [*pricking up his ears—inquisitively*]. Huh?

EMMA. Not in two days nor no time.

HARRIET [*dumbfounded*]. Why, Emmer Crosby! Whatever's got into you? You and Caleb must have had an awful spat!

ROGERS [*with a man-of-the-world attitude of cynicism*]. Don't take her so dead serious, Harriet. Emmer'll git over it like you all does.

EMMA [*angrily*]. You shet up, Alf Rogers!

[MRS. CROSBY *enters bustlingly from the right. She is a large, fat, florid woman of fifty. In spite of her two hundred and more pounds she is surprisingly active, and the passive, lazy expression of her round moon face is belied by her quick, efficient movements. She exudes an atmosphere of motherly good nature. She wears an apron on which she is drying her hands as she enters.* JACK *follows her into the room. He has changed to a dark suit, is ready for "up street."*]

MRS. CROSBY [*smiling at* HARRIET *and* ROGERS]. Afternoon, Harriet—and Alf.

HARRIET. Afternoon, Ma.

ROGERS. Afternoon.

JACK [*grinning*]. There she be, Ma. [*Points to* EMMA.] Don't she look like she'd scratch a feller's eyes out! Phew! Look at her back curve! Meow? Sptt-sptt! Nice puss!

[*He gives a vivid imitation of a cat fight at this last. Then he and* ROGERS *roar with laughter and* HARRIET *cannot restrain a giggle and* MRS. CROSBY *smiles.* EMMA *stares stonily before her as if she didn't hear.*]

MRS. CROSBY [*good-naturedly*]. Shet up your foolin', Jack.

JACK [*pretending to be hurt*]. Nobody in this house kin take a joke. [*He grins and beckons to* ROGERS.] Come along, Alf. You kin 'preciate a joke. Come on in here till I tell you.

[*The grinning* ROGERS *follows him into the next room where they can be heard talking and laughing during the following scene.*]

MRS. CROSBY [*smiling, puts her arms around* EMMA]. Waal, Emmer, what's this foolishness Jack's been tellin' about—

EMMA [*resentfully*]. It ain't foolishness, Ma. I've made up my mind, I tell you that right here and now.

MRS. CROSBY [*after a quick glance at her face—soothingly*]. There, there! Let's set down and be comfortable. Me, I don't relish roostin' on my feet. [*She pushes* EMMA *gently into a rocker—then points to a chair on the other side of the table.*] Set down, Harriet.

HARRIET [*torn between curiosity and a sense of being one too many*]. Maybe I'd best go to home and leave you two alone?

MRS. CROSBY. Shucks! Ain't you like one o' the family—Caleb's sister and livin' right next door ever since you was all children playin' together? We ain't got no secrets from you. Set down. [HARRIET *does so with an uncertain glance at the frozen* EMMA. MRS. CROSBY *has efficiently bustled another rocker beside her daughter's and sits*

down with a comfortable sigh.] There. [*She reaches over and takes one of her daughter's hands in hers.*] And now, Emmer, what's all this fuss over? [*As* EMMA *makes no reply.*] Jack says as you've sworn you was breakin' with Caleb. Is that true?

EMMA. Yes.

MRS. CROSBY. Hmm. Caleb don't know this yet, does he?

EMMA. No. I asked Jack to tell him when he comes back.

MRS. CROSBY. Jack says he won't.

EMMA. Then I'll tell him myself. Maybe that's better, anyhow. Caleb'll know what I'm driving at and see my reason — [*Bitterly*] — which nobody else seems to.

MRS. CROSBY. Hmm. You ain't tried me yet. [*After a pause.*] Jack was a dumb fool to tell you 'bout them goin's-on at them islands they teched. Ain't no good repeatin' sech things.

EMMA [*surprised*]. Did you know about it before Jack —

MRS. CROSBY. Mercy, yes. Your Pa heard it from Jim Benson fust thing they landed here, and Pa told me that night.

EMMA [*resentfully*]. And you never told me!

MRS. CROSBY. Mercy, no. 'Course I didn't. They's trouble enough in the world without makin' more. If you was like most folks I'd told it to you. Me, I thought it was a good joke on Caleb.

EMMA [*with a shudder*]. It ain't a joke to me.

MRS. CROSBY. That's why I kept my mouth shet. I knowed you was touchy and diff'rent from most.

EMMA [*proudly*]. Yes, I am diff'rent — and that's just what I thought Caleb was, too — and he ain't.

HARRIET [*breaking in excitedly*]. Is it that story about Caleb and that heathen brown woman you're talking about? Is that what you're mad at Caleb for, Emmer?

MRS. CROSBY [*as* EMMA *remains silent*]. Yes, Harriet, that's it.

HARRIET [*astonished*]. Why, Emmer Crosby, how can you be so silly? You don't s'pose Caleb took it serious, do you, and him makin' them fire shots round her to scare her back to land and get rid of her? Good gracious! [*A bit resentfully.*] I hope you ain't got it in your head my brother Caleb would sink so low as to fall in love serious with one of them critters?

EMMA [*harshly*]. He might just as well.

HARRIET [*bridling*]. How can you say sech a thing! [*Sarcastically.*] I ain't heard that Caleb offered to marry her, have you? Then you might have some cause — But d'you s'pose he's ever give her another thought? Not Caleb! I know him better'n that. He'd forgot all about the hull thing before they was out o' sight of land, I'll bet, and if them fools hadn't started this story going, he'd never remembered it again.

MRS. CROSBY [*nodding*]. That's jest it. Harriet's right, Emmer.

EMMA. Ma!

MRS. CROSBY. Besides, you don't know they was nothin' wrong happened. Nobody kin swear that for sartin. Ain't that so, Harriet?

HARRIET [*hesitating — then frankly*]. I don't know. Caleb ain't no plaster saint and I reckon he's as likely to sin that way as any other man. He wasn't married then and I s'pose he thought he was free to do as he'd a mind to 'til he was hitched up. Goodness sakes, Emmer, all the men thinks that — and a lot of 'em after they're married, too.

MRS. CROSBY. Harriet's right, Emmer. If you've been wide awake to all that's happened in this town since you was old enough to know, you'd ought to realize what men be.

HARRIET [*scornfully*]. Emma'd ought to have fallen in love with a minister, not a sailor. As for me, I wouldn't give a durn about a man that was too goody-goody to raise Cain once in a while — before he married me, I mean. Why, look at Alf Rogers, Emmer. I'm going to marry him some day, ain't I? But I know right well all the foolin' he's done — and still is doing, I expect. I ain't sayin' I like it but I do like him and I got to take him the way he is, that's all. If you're looking for saints, you

got to die first and go to heaven. A girl'd never git married hereabouts if she expected too much.

MRS. CROSBY. Harriet's right, Emmer.

EMMA [*resentfully*]. Maybe she is. Ma, from her side. I ain't claiming she's wrong. Her and me just looks at things diff'rent, that's all. And she can't understand the way I feel about Caleb.

HARRIET. Well, there's one thing certain, Emmer. You won't find a man in a day's walk is any better'n Caleb — or as good.

EMMA [*wearily*]. I know that, Harriet.

HARRIET. Then it's all right. You'll make up with him, and I s'pose I'm a fool to be takin' it so serious. [*As* EMMA *shakes her head.*] Oh, yes, you will. You wouldn't want to get him all broke up, would you? [*As* EMMA *keeps silent — irritably.*] Story book notions, that's the trouble with you, Emmer. You're gettin' to think you're better'n the rest of us.

EMMA [*vehemently*]. No, I don't! Can't you see —

MRS. CROSBY. Thar, now! Don't you two git to fightin' — to make things worse.

HARRIET [*repentantly, coming and putting her arms around* EMMA *and kissing her*]. I'm sorry, Emmer. You know I wouldn't fall out with you for nothing or nobody, don't you? Only it gits me riled to think of how awful broke up Caleb'd be if — But you'll make it all up with him when he comes, won't you?

[EMMA *stares stubbornly before her. Before she has a chance to reply a roar of laughter comes from the next room as* JACK *winds up his tale.*]

ROGERS [*from the next room*]. Gosh, I wished I'd been there! [*He follows* JACK *into the room. Both are grinning broadly.* ROGERS *says teasingly.*] Reckon I'll take to whalin' 'stead o' fishin' after this. You won't mind, Harriet? From what I hears o' them brown women, I'm missin' a hull lot by stayin' to home.

HARRIET [*in a joking tone — with a meaning glance at* EMMA]. Go on, then! There's plenty of fish in the sea. Anyhow, I'd never git jealous of your foolin' with one o' them heathen critters. They ain't worth notice from a Christian.

JACK. Oho, ain't they! They're purty as pictures, Benson says. [*With a wink.*] And mighty accommodatin' in their ways.

[*He and* ROGERS *roar delightedly.* EMMA *shudders with revulsion.*]

MRS. CROSBY [*aware of her daughter's feeling — smilingly but firmly*]. Get out o' this, Jack. You, too, Alf. Go on up street if you want to joke. You're in my way.

JACK. Aw right, Ma. Come on up street, Alf.

HARRIET. Wait. I'll go with you a step. I got to see if Caleb's got back with them supper things. [*They all go to the door in rear.* JACK *and* ROGERS *pass out, talking and laughing.* HARRIET *turns in the doorway — sympathetically.*] I'll give Caleb a talking-to before he comes over. Then it'll be easy for you to finish him. Treat him firm but gentle and you'll see he won't never do it again in a hurry. After all, he wasn't married, Emmer — and he's a man — and what can you expect? Good-by. [*She goes.*]

EMMA [*inaudibly*]. Good-by.

MRS. CROSBY [*after a pause in which she rocks back and forth studying her daughter's face — placidly*]. Harriet's right, Emmer. You give him a good talkin'-to and he won't do it again.

EMMA [*coldly*]. I don't care whether he does or not. I ain't going to marry him.

MRS. CROSBY [*uneasy — persuasively*]. Mercy, you can't act like that, Emmer. Here's the weddin' on'y two days off, and everythin' fixed up with the minister, and your Pa and Jack has bought new clothes speshul for it, and I got a new dress —

EMMA [*turning to her mother — pleadingly*]. You wouldn't want me to keep my promise to Caleb if you knew I'd be unhappy, would you, Ma?

MRS. CROSBY [*hesitatingly*]. N-no, Emmer. [*Then decisively.*] 'Course I

wouldn't. It's because I know he'll make you happy. [*As* Emma *shakes her head.*] Pshaw, Emmer, you can't tell me you've got over all likin' for him jest 'count o' this one foolishness o' hisn.

Emma. I don't love him — what he is now. I loved — what I thought he was.

Mrs. Crosby [*more and more uneasy*]. That's all your queer notions, and I don't know where you gits them from. Caleb ain't changed, neither have you. Why, Emmer, it'd be jest like goin' agen an act of Nature for you not to marry him. Ever since you was children you been livin' side by side, goin' round together, and neither you nor him ever did seem to care for no one else. Shucks, Emmer, you'll git me to lose patience with you if you act that stubborn. You'd ought to remember all he's been to you and forget this one little wrong he's done.

Emma. I can't, Ma. It makes him another person — not Caleb, but someone just like all the others.

Mrs. Crosby. Waal, is the others so bad? Men is men the world over, I reckon.

Emma. No, they ain't bad. I ain't saying that. Don't I like 'em all? If it was one of the rest — like Jim Benson or Jack, even — had done this I'd thought it was a joke, too. I ain't strict in judging 'em and you know it. But — can't you see, Ma? — Caleb always seemed diff'rent — and I thought he was.

Mrs. Crosby [*somewhat impatiently*]. Waal, if he ain't, he's a good man jest the same, as good as any sensible girl'd want to marry.

Emma [*slowly*]. I don't want to marry nobody no more. I'll stay single.

Mrs. Crosby [*tauntingly*]. An old maid! [*Then resentfully.*] Emmer, d'you s'pose if I'd had your high-fangled notions o' what men ought to be when I was your age, d'you s'pose you'd ever be settin' there now?

Emma [*slowly*]. No. I know from what I can guess from his own stories Pa never was no saint.

Mrs. Crosby [*in a tone of finality as if this settled the matter*]. There, now! And ain't he been as good a husband to me as ever lived, and a good father to you and Jack? You'll find out Caleb'll turn out the same. You think it over. [*She gets up — bustlingly.*] And now I got to git back in the kitchen.

Emma [*wringing her hands — desperately*]. Oh, Ma, why can't you see what I feel? Of course, Pa's good — as good as good can be —

Captain Crosby [*from outside the door which he has approached without their noticing him — in a jovial bellow*]. What's that 'bout Pa bein' good? [*He comes in laughing. He is a squat, bow-legged, powerful man, almost as broad as he is long — sixty years old but still in the prime of health and strength, with a great, red, weather-beaten face seamed by sun wrinkles. His sandy hair is thick and disheveled. He is dressed in an old baggy suit much the worse for wear — striped cotton shirt open at the neck. He pats* Emma *on the back with a playful touch that almost jars her off her feet.*] Thunderin' Moses, that's the fust time ever I heerd good o' myself by listenin'! Most times it's: "Crosby? D'you mean that drunken, good-for-nothin', mangy old cuss?" That's what I hears usual. Thank ye, Emmer. [*Turning to his wife.*] What ye got to say now, Ma? Here's Emmer tellin' you the truth after you hair-pullin' me all these years 'cause you thought it wa'n't. I always told ye I was good, ain't I — good as hell I be!

[*He shakes with laughter and kisses his wife a resounding smack.*]

Mrs. Crosby [*teasing lovingly*]. Emmer don't know you like I do.

Crosby [*turning back to* Emma *again*]. Look-a-here, Emmer, I jest seen Jack. He told me some fool story 'bout you fallin' out with Caleb. Reckon he was joshin', wa'n't he?

Mrs. Crosby [*quickly*]. Oh, that's all settled, John. Don't you go stirrin' it up again.

[Emma *seems about to speak but stops helplessly after one glance at her father.*]

CROSBY. An' all 'count o' that joke they're tellin' 'bout him and that brown female critter, Jack says. Hell, Emmer, you ain't a real Crosby if you takes a joke like that serious. Thunderin' Moses, what the hell d'you want Caleb to be — a durned, he-virgin, sky-pilot? Caleb's a man wo'th ten o' most and, spite o' his bein' on'y a boy yit, he's the smartest skipper out o' this port and you'd ought to be proud you'd got him. And as for them islands, all whalin' men knows 'em. I've teched thar for water more'n once myself, and I know them brown females like a book. And I tells you, after a year or more aboard ship, a man'd have to be a goll-durned geldin' if he don't —

MRS. CROSBY [*glancing uneasily at* EMMA]. Ssshh! You come out in the kitchen with me, Pa, and leave Emmer be.

CROSBY. God A'mighty, Ma, I ain't sayin' nothin' agen Emmer, be I? I knows Emmer ain't that crazy. If she ever got religion that bad, I'd ship her off as female missionary to the damned yellow Chinks. [*He laughs.*]

MRS. CROSBY [*taking his arm*]. You come with me. I want to talk with you 'bout somethin'.

CROSBY [*going*]. Aye-aye, skipper! You're boss aboard here. [*He goes out right with her, laughing.* EMMA *stands for a while, staring stonily before her. She sighs hopelessly, clasping and unclasping her hands, looking around the room as if she longed to escape from it. Finally she sits down helplessly and remains fixed in a strained attitude, her face betraying the conflict that is tormenting her. Slow steps sound from the path in front of the house.* EMMA *recognizes them and her face freezes into an expression of obstinate intolerance.* CALEB *appears outside the screen door. He looks in, coughs — then asks uncertainly.*] It's me, Emmer. Kin I come in?

EMMA [*coldly*]. Yes.

CALEB [*comes in and walks down beside her chair. His face is set emotionlessly but his eyes cannot conceal a worried bewilderment, a look of uncomprehending hurt. He stands uncomfortably, fumbling with his hat, waiting for her to speak or look up. As she does neither, he finally blurts out*]. Kin I set a spell?

EMMA [*in the same cold tone*]. Yes. [*He lowers himself carefully to a wooden posture on the edge of a rocker near hers.*]

CALEB [*after a pause*]. I seen Jim Benson. I give him hell. He won't tell no more tales, I reckon. [*Another pause.*] I stopped to home on the way back from the store. I seen Harriet. She says Jack'd told you that story they're all tellin' as a joke on me. [*Clenching his fists — angrily.*] Jack's a durn fool. He needs a good lickin' from someone.

EMMA [*resentfully*]. Don't try to put the blame on Jack. He only told me the truth, didn't he?

[*Her voice shows that she hopes against hope for a denial.*]

CALEB [*after a long pause — regretfully*]. Waal, I guess what he told is true enough.

EMMA [*wounded*]. Oh!

CALEB. But that ain't no good reason for tellin' it. Them sort o' things ought to be kept among men. [*After a pause — gropingly.*] I didn't want nothin' like that to happen, Emmer. I didn't mean it to. I was thinkin' o' how you might feel — even down there. That's why I stayed aboard all the time when the boys was ashore. I wouldn't have b'lieved it could happen — not to me. [*A pause.*] I wish you could see them Islands, Emmer, and be there for a time. Then you might see — It's hard 's hell to explain, and you havin' never seen 'em. Everything is diff'rent down there — the weather — and the trees and water. You git lookin' at it all, and you git to feel diff'rent from what you do to home here. It's purty hereabouts sometimes — like now, in spring — but it's purty there all the time — and down there you notice it and you git feelin' — diff'rent. And them native women — they're diff'rent. A man don't think of 'em as women — like you. But they're purty — in their fashion — and at night

they sings—and it's all diff'rent like something you'd seen in a painted picture. [*A pause.*] That night when she swum out and got aboard when I was alone, she caught me by s'prise. I wasn't expectin' nothin' o' that sort. I tried to make her git back to land at fust—but she wouldn't go. She couldn't understand enough English for me to tell her how I felt—and I reckon she wouldn't have seed my p'int anyhow, her bein' a native. [*A pause.*] And then I was afeerd she'd catch cold goin' round all naked and wet in the moonlight—though it was warm—and I wanted to wrap a blanket round her.

[*He stops as if he had finished.*]

EMMA [*after a long, tense pause—dully*]. Then you own up—there really was something happened?

CALEB [*after a pause*]. I was sorry for it, after. I locked myself in the cabin and left her to sleep out on deck.

EMMA [*after a pause—fixedly*]. I ain't going to marry you, Caleb.

CALEB. Harriet said you'd said that; but I didn't b'lieve you'd let a slip like that make—such a diff'rence.

EMMA [*with finality*]. Then you can believe it now, Caleb.

CALEB [*after a pause*]. You got queer, strict notions, Emmer. A man'll never live up to 'em—with never one slip. But you got to act accordin' to your lights, I expect. It sort o' busts everythin' to bits for me— [*His voice betrays his anguish for a second but he instantly regains his iron control.*] But o' course, if you ain't willin' to take me the way I be, there's nothin' to do. And whatever you think is best, suits me.

EMMA [*after a pause—gropingly*]. I wish I could explain my side of it—so's you'd understand. I ain't got any hard feelings against you, Caleb—not now. It ain't plain jealousy—what I feel. It ain't even that I think you've done nothing terrible wrong. I think I can understand—how it happened—and make allowances. I know that most any man would do the same, and I guess all of 'em I ever met has done it.

CALEB [*with a glimmer of eager hope*]. Then—you'll forgive it, Emmer?

EMMA. Yes, I forgive it. But don't think that my forgiving is going to make any diff'rence—'cause I ain't going to marry you, Caleb. That's final. [*After a pause—intensely.*] Oh, I wish I could make you see—my reason. You don't. You never will, I expect. What you done is just what any other man would have done—and being like them is exactly what'll keep you from ever seeing my meanings. [*After a pause—in a last effort to make him understand.*] Maybe it's my fault more'n your'n. It's like this, Caleb. Ever since we was little I guess I've always had the idea that you was—diff'rent. And when we growed up and got engaged I thought that more and more. And you was diff'rent, too! And that was why I loved you. And now you've proved you ain't. And so how can I love you any more? I don't, Caleb, and that's all there is to it. You've busted something way down inside me—and I can't love you no more.

CALEB [*gloomily*]. I've warned you often, ain't I, you was settin' me up where I'd no business to be. I'm human like the rest and always was. I ain't diff'rent. [*After a pause—uncertainly.*] I reckon there ain't no use sayin' nothin' more. I'll go to home.

[*He starts to rise.*]

EMMA. Wait. I don't want you to go out of here with no hard feelings. You 'n' me, Caleb, we've been too close all our lives to ever get to be enemies. I like you, Caleb, same's I always did. I want us to stay friends. I want you to be like one of the family same's you've always been. There's no reason you can't. I don't blame you—as a man—for what I wouldn't hold against any other man. If I find I can't love you—that way—no more or be your wife, it's just that I've decided—things being what they be and me being what I am—I won't marry no man. I'll stay single. [*Forcing a smile.*] I guess there's worse things than being an old maid.

CALEB. I can't picture you that, Emmer. It's natural in some but it ain't in you. [*Then with a renewal of*

hope.] And o' course I want to stay friends with you, Emmer. There's no hard feelin's on my side. You got a right to your own way — even if — [*Hopefully.*] And maybe if I show you what I done wasn't natural to me — by never doin' it again — maybe the time'll come when you'll be willin' to forget —

EMMA [*shaking her head — slowly*]. It ain't a question of time, Caleb. It's a question of something being dead. And when a thing's died, time can't make no diff'rence.

CALEB [*sturdily*]. You don't know that for sure, Emmer. You're human, too, and as liable to make mistakes as any other. Maybe you on'y think it's dead, and when I come back from the next vige and you've had two years to think it over, you'll see diff'rent and know I ain't as bad as I seem to ye now.

EMMA [*helplessly*]. But you don't seem bad, Caleb. And two years can't make no change in me — that way.

CALEB [*feeling himself somehow more and more heartened by hope*]. I ain't givin' up hope, Emmer, and you can't make me. Not by a hell of a sight. [*With emphasis.*] I ain't never goin' to marry no woman but you, Emmer. You can trust my word for that. And I'll wait for ye to change your mind, I don't give a durn how long it'll take — till I'm sixty years old — thirty years if it's needful!

[*He rises to his feet as he is speaking this last.*]

EMMA [*with a mournful smile*]. You might just as well say for life, Caleb. In thirty years we'll both be dead and gone, probably. And I don't want you to think it's needful for you to stay single 'cause I —

CALEB. I ain't goin' to stay single. I'm goin' to wait for you. And some day when you realize men was never cut out for angels you'll —

EMMA [*helplessly*]. Me 'n' you'll never understand each other, Caleb, so long as we live. [*Getting up and holding out her hand.*] Good-by, Caleb. I'm going up and lie down for a spell.

CALEB [*made hopeless again by her tone — clasps her hand mechanically — dully*]. Good-by, Emmer. [*He goes to the door in the rear, opens it, then hesitates and looks back at her as she goes out the door on the right without turning around. Suddenly he blurts out despairingly.*] You'll remember what I told ye 'bout waitin', Emmer?

[*She is gone, makes no reply. His face sets in its concealment mask of emotionlessness and he turns slowly and goes out the door as*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

SCENE.—*Thirty years after — the scene is the same but not the same. The room has a grotesque aspect of old age turned flighty and masquerading as the most empty-headed youth. There is an obstreperous newness about everything. Orange curtains are at the windows. The carpet has given way to a varnished hardwood floor, its glassy surface set off by three small, garish-colored rugs, placed with precision in front of the two doors and under the table. The wall paper is now a cream color sprayed with pink flowers. Seascapes, of the painted-to-order quality, four in number, in gilded frames, are hung on the walls at mathematically spaced intervals. The plush-covered chairs are gone, replaced by a set of varnished oak. The horsehair sofa has been relegated to the attic. A cane-bottomed affair with fancy cushions serves in its stead. A Victrola is where the old mahogany chest had been. A brand new piano shines resplendently in the far right corner by the door, and a bookcase with glass doors that pull up and slide in flanks the fireplace. This bookcase is full of installment-plan sets of uncut volumes. The table at center is of varnished oak. On it*

are piles of fashion magazines and an electric reading lamp. Only the old Bible, which still preserves its place of honor on the table, and the marble clock on the mantel, have survived the renovation and serve to emphasize it all the more by contrast.

It is late afternoon of a day in the early spring of the year 1920.

As the curtain rises, EMMA *and* BENNY ROGERS *are discovered. She is seated in a rocker by the table. He is standing by the Victrola on which a jazz band record is playing. He whistles, goes through the motions of dancing to the music. He is a young fellow of twenty-three, a replica of his father in Act One, but coarser, more hardened and cocksure. He is dressed in the khaki uniform of a private in the United States Army. The thirty years have transformed* EMMA *into a withered, scrawny woman. But there is something revoltingly incongruous about her, a pitiable sham, a too-apparent effort to cheat the years by appearances. The white dress she wears is too frilly, too youthful for her; so are the high-heeled pumps and clocked silk stockings. There is an absurd suggestion of rouge on her tight cheeks and thin lips, of penciled make-up about her eyes. The black of her hair is brazenly untruthful. Above all there is shown in her simpering, self-consciously coquettish manner that laughable — and at the same time irritating and disgusting — mockery of undignified age snatching greedily at the empty simulacra of youth. She resembles some passé stock actress of fifty made up for a heroine of twenty.*

BENNY [*as the record stops — switches off the machine*]. Oh, baby! Some jazz, I'll tell the world!

EMMA [*smiling lovingly at his back*]. I'm glad you like it. It's one of them you picked out on the list.

BENNY. Oh, I'm a swell little picker, aw right. [*Turning to her.*] Say, you're a regular feller — gettin' them records for me.

EMMA [*coquettishly*]. Well, if that ain't just like a man! Who told you I got them just for you?

BENNY. Well, didn't you?

EMMA. No indeedy! I only took your advice on what to get. I knew you'd know, being growed to a man of the world now since you was overseas. But I got 'em because I like them jazz tunes myself. They put life and ginger in an old lady like me — not like them slow, old-timey tunes.

BENNY [*bends over chair — kiddingly*]. You ain't old. That's all bunk.

EMMA [*flattered*]. Now, now, Benny!

BENNY. You ain't. You're a regular, up-to-date sport — the only live one in this dead dump. [*With a grin.*] And if you fall for that jazz stuff, all you got to do now is learn to dance to it.

EMMA [*giggling*]. I will — if you'll teach me.

BENNY [*struggling with a guffaw*]. Oh, oui! Sure I will! We'll have a circus, me an' you. Say, you're sure one of the girls aw right, Aunt Emmer.

EMMA. Oh, you needn't think we're *all* so behind the times to home here just because you've been to France and all over.

BENNY. *You* ain't, I'll say, Aunt Emmer.

EMMA. And how often have I got to tell you not to call me Aunt Emmer?

BENNY [*with a grin*]. Oh, oui! My foot slipped. 'Scuse me, Emmer.

EMMA [*delighted by his coarse familiarity*]. That's better. Why, you know well enough I ain't your aunt anyway.

BENNY. I got to get used to the plain Emmer. They taught me to call you "aunt" when I was a kid. [EMMA *looks displeased at this remark and* BENNY *hastens to add cajolingly.*] And you almost was my aunt-in-law one time from what I've heard.

[*Winks at her cunningly.*]

EMMA [*flustered*]. That was ages ago. [*Catching herself quickly.*] Not so awful long really, but it's all so dead and gone it seems a long while.

BENNY [*unthinkingly*]. It was before I was born, wasn't it? [*Seeing her expression he hurries on.*] Well, that ain't so darned long. Say, here's something I never could make out — how did you ever come to fall for Uncle Caleb?

EMMA [*bridling quickly*]. I never did. That's all talk, Benny. We was good friends and still are. I was young and foolish and got engaged to him — and then discovered I didn't like him that way. That's all there ever was to it.

BENNY [*resentfully*]. I can't figure how anybody'd ever like him anyway. He's a darn stingy, ugly old cuss, if you want my dope on him. I can't see him at all. I've hated him ever since Pa died and Ma and me had to go live next door with him.

EMMA. You oughtn't to say that. He's kind at bottom, spite of his rough ways, and he's brought you up.

BENNY [*grumpily*]. Dragged me up, you mean. [*With a calculating look at her out of the corners of his eyes.*] He's a tight-wad and I hate folks that're tight with their coin. Spend and be a good sport, that's my motto. [*Flattering.*] He'd ought to be more like you that way, Emmer.

EMMA [*pleased — condescendingly*]. Your Uncle Caleb's an old man, remember. He's sot in his ways and believes in being strict with you — too strict, I've told him.

BENNY. He's got piles of money hoarded in the bank but he's too mean even to retire from whalin' himself — goes right on makin' vige after vige to grab more and never spends a nickel less'n he has to. It was always like pryin' open a safe for me to separate him from a cent. [*With extreme disgust.*] Aw, he's a piker. I hate him and I always did!

EMMA [*looking toward the door apprehensively*]. Ssshh!

BENNY. What you scared of? He don't get in from New Bedford till the night train and even if he's got to the house by this he'll be busy as a bird dog for an hour getting himself dolled up to pay you a call.

EMMA [*perfunctorily*]. I hope he's had a good vige and is in good health.

BENNY [*roughly*]. You needn't worry. He's too mean ever to get real sick. Gosh, I wish Pa'd lived — or Uncle Jack. They wasn't like him. I was only a kid when they got drowned, but I remember enough about 'em to know they was good sports. Wasn't they?

EMMA [*rather primly*]. They was too sporty for their own good.

BENNY. Don't you hand me that. That don't sound like you. You're a sport yourself. [*After a pause.*] Say, it's nutty when you come to think of it — Uncle Caleb livin' next door all these years and comin' to call all the time when he ain't at sea.

EMMA. What's funny about that? We've always been good friends.

BENNY [*with a grin*]. It's just as if the old guy was still mashin' you. And I'll bet anything he's as stuck on you as he ever was — the old fool!

EMMA [*with a coquettish titter*]. Land sakes, Benny, a body'd think you were actually jealous of your uncle the way you go on.

BENNY [*with a mocking laugh*] Jealous! Oh, oui! Sure I am! Kin you blame me? [*Then seriously, with a calculating look at her.*] No, all kiddin' aside, I know he'll run me down first second he sees you. Ma'll tell him all her tales, and he'll be sore at me right off. He's always hated me anyway. He was glad when I enlisted, 'cause that got him rid of me. All he was hopin' was that some German'd get me for keeps. Then when I come back he wouldn't do nothin' for me so I enlisted again.

EMMA [*chiding — playfully*]. Now, Benny! Didn't you tell me you enlisted again 'cause you were sick o' this small place and wanted to be out where there was more fun?

BENNY. Well, o' course it was that, too. But I could have a swell time even in this dump if he'd loosen up and give me some kale. [*Again with the calculating look at her.*] Why, look here, right now there's a buddy of mine wants me to meet him in Boston and he'll show

me a good time, and if I had a hundred dollars —

EMMA. A hundred dollars! That's an awful pile to spend, Benny.

BENNY [*disgustedly*]. Now you're talkin' tight like him.

EMMA [*hastily*]. Oh, no, Benny. You know better'n that. What was you sayin' — if you had a hundred dollars — ?

BENNY. That ain't such a much these days with everything gone up so. If I went to Boston I'd have to get dolled up and everything. And this buddy of mine is a sport and a spender. Easy come, easy go is his motto. His folks ain't tight-wads like mine. And I couldn't show myself up as a cheap skate by travelin' 'round with him without a nickel in my jeans and just spongin' on him. [*With the calculating glance to see what effect his words are having — pretending to dismiss the subject.*] But what's the good of talkin'? I got a swell chance tellin' that to Uncle Caleb. He'd give me one look and then put a double padlock on his roll. But it ain't fair just the same. Here I'm sweatin' blood in the army after riskin' my life in France and when I get a leave to home, everyone treats me like a wet dog.

EMMA [*softly*]. Do you mean me, too, Benny?

BENNY. No, not you. You're diff'rent from the rest. You're regular — and you ain't any of my real folks, either, and ain't got any reason.

EMMA [*coquettishly*]. Oh, yes, I have a reason. I like you very, very much, Benny — better than anyone in the town — especially since you've been to home these last few times and come to call so often and I feel I've growed to know you. When you first came back from France I never would have recognized you as Harriet's Benny, you was so big and strong and handsome.

BENNY [*uncomfortably*]. Aw, you're kiddin'. But you can tell how good I think you are from me bein' over here so much — so you know I ain't lyin'. [*Made more and more uncomfortable by the ardent looks* EMMA *is casting at him.*] Well, guess I'll be movin' along.

EMMA [*pleadingly*]. Oh, you mustn't go yet! Just when we're gettin' so friendly!

BENNY. Uncle Caleb'll be over soon and I don't want him to catch me here — nor nowhere else till he gets calmed down after hearin' Ma's kicks about me. So I guess I better beat it up street.

EMMA. He won't come for a long time yet. I know when to expect him. [*Pleading ardently and kittenishly.*] Do set down a spell, Benny! Land sakes, I hardly get a sight of you before you want to run away again. I'll begin to think you're only pretending to like me.

BENNY [*seeing his calculations demand it*]. Aw right — jest for a second. [*He looks about him, seeking a neutral subject for conversation.*] Gee, you've had this old place fixed up swell since I was to home last.

EMMA [*coquettishly*]. Guess who I had it all done for, mostly?

BENNY. For yourself, of course.

EMMA [*shaking her head roguishly*]. No, not for me, not for me! Not that I don't like it but I'd never have gone to the trouble and expense for myself. [*With a sigh.*] I s'pose poor Ma and Pa turned over in their graves when I ordered it done.

BENNY [*with a sly grin*]. Who d'you have it done for, then?

EMMA. For you! Yes, for you, Benny — so's you'd have a nice, up-to-date place to come to when you was on vacation from the horrid old army.

BENNY [*embarrassed*]. Well, it's great aw right. And it sure looks swell — nothing cheap about it.

EMMA [*delighted*]. As long as you like it, I'm satisfied. [*Then suddenly, wagging an admonishing finger at him and hiding beneath a joking manner an undercurrent of uneasiness.*] I was forgetting I got a bone to pick with you, young man! I heard them sayin' to the store that you'd been up callin' on that Tilly Small evenin' before last.

BENNY [*with a lady-killer's carelessness*]. Aw, I was passin' by and she called me in, that's all.

EMMA [*frowning*]. They said you

had the piano goin' and was singing and no end of high jinks.

BENNY. Aw, these small town boobs think you're raising hell if you're up after eleven.

EMMA [*excitedly*]. I ain't blamin' you. But her — she ought to have better sense — at her age, too, when she's old enough to be your mother.

BENNY. Aw, say, she ain't half as old — [*Catching himself.*] Oh, she's an old fool, you're right there, Emmer.

EMMA [*severely*]. And I hope you know the kind of woman she is and has been since she was a girl.

BENNY [*with a wink*]. I wasn't born yesterday. I got her number long ago. I ain't in my cradle, get me! I'm in the army! Oui! [*Chuckles.*]

EMMA [*fidgeting nervously*]. What'd you — what'd you do when you was there?

BENNY. Why, nothin'. I told her to cut the rough work and behave — and a nice time was had by all.

[*He grins provokingly.*]

EMMA [*springs to her feet nervously*]. I don't know what to think — when you act so queer about it.

BENNY [*carelessly*]. Well, don't think nothing wrong — 'cause there wasn't. Bill Tinker was with me and we was both wishin' we had a drink. And Bill says, "Let's go see Tilly Small. She always has some buried and if we hand her a line of talk maybe she'll drag out the old bottle." So we did — and she did. We kidded her for a couple of drinks. [*He snickers.*]

EMMA [*standing in front of him — fidgeting*]. I want you to promise you won't go to see her no more. If you — if you want liquor now and again maybe I — maybe I can fix it so's I can get some to keep here for you.

BENNY [*eagerly*]. Say, that'd be great! Will you? [*She nods. He goes on carelessly.*] And sure I'll promise not to see Tilly no more. Gosh, what do you think I care about her? Or about any dame in this town, for that matter — 'ceptin' you. These small town skirts don't hand me nothin'. [*With a grin.*] You forgot I was in France — and after the dames over there these birds here look some punk.

EMMA [*sits down — wetting her lips*]. And what — what are those French critters like?

BENNY [*with a wink*]. Oh, boy! They're some pippins! It ain't so much that they're better lookin' as that they've got a way with 'em — lots of ways. [*He laughs with a lascivious smirk.*]

EMMA [*unconsciously hitches her chair nearer his. The turn the conversation has taken seems to have aroused a hectic, morbid intensity in her. She continually wets her lips and pushes back her hair from her flushed face as if it were stifling her*]. What do you mean, Benny? What kind of ways have they got — them French girls?

BENNY [*smirking mysteriously*]. Oh, ways of dressin' and doin' their hair — and lots of ways.

EMMA [*eagerly*]. Tell me! Tell me all about 'em. You needn't be scared — to talk open with me. I ain't as strict as I seem — about hearin' things. Tell me! I've heard French girls was awful wicked.

BENNY. I don't know about wicked, but they're darned good sports. They'd do anything a guy'd ask 'em. Oui, tooty sweet! [*Laughs foolishly.*]

EMMA. And what — what'd you ask 'em, for instance?

BENNY [*with a wink*]. Curiosity killed a cat! Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

EMMA [*with queer, stupid insistence*]. But won't you tell me? Go on!

BENNY. Can't be did, Aunt Emmer, can't be did! [*With a silly laugh.*] You're too young. No, all I'll say is, that to the boys who've knocked around over there the girls in town here are just rank amatoors. They don't know how to love and that's a fact. [*He gets to his feet.*] And as for an old bum like Tilly — not me! Well, I guess I'll hike along —

EMMA [*getting up and putting a hand on his arm — feverishly*]. No, don't go. Not yet — not yet. No, don't go.

BENNY [*stepping away with an expression of repulsion*]. Why not?

What's the matter with you, Aunt Emmer? You look 's if you was gettin' sick.

[*Before she can reply,* HARRIET'S *voice is heard calling.*]

HARRIET. Benny! Benny!

[*This acts like a pail of cold water on* EMMA *who moves away from* BENNY *quickly.*]

EMMA. That's Harriet. It's your Ma calling, Benny.

BENNY [*impatiently*]. I know. That means Uncle Caleb has come and she's told him her stories and it's up to me to go catch hell. [*Stopping* EMMA *as she goes toward the door as if to answer* HARRIET'S *hail.*] Don't answer, Aunt Emmer. Let her come over here to look. I want to speak to her and find out how I stand before he sees me.

EMMA [*doubtfully*]. I don't know as she'll come. She's been actin' funny to me lately, Harriet has, and she ain't put her foot in my door the last month.

BENNY [*as his mother's voice is heard much nearer, calling "Benny!"*]. There! Sure she's comin'.

EMMA [*flustered*]. Land sakes, I can't let her see me this way. I got to run upstairs and tidy myself a little.

[*She starts for the door at right.*]

BENNY [*flatteringly*]. Aw, you look swell. Them new duds you got looks great.

EMMA [*turning in the doorway—coquettishly*]. Oh, them French girls ain't the only ones knows how to fix up.

[*She flounces out.* BENNY *stands looking after her with a derisive grin of contempt. There is a sharp knock on the door in the rear.* BENNY *goes to open it, his expression turning surly and sullen.* HARRIET *enters. She wears an apron over her old-fashioned black dress with a brooch at the neck. Her hair is gray, her face thin, lined, and careworn, with a fretful, continuously irritated expression. Her shoulders stoop, and her figure is flabby and ugly. She stares at her son with resentful annoyance.*]

HARRIET. Ain't you got sense enough, you big lump, to answer me when I call, and not have me shouting my lungs out?

BENNY. I never heard you callin'.

HARRIET. You're lyin' and you know it. [*Then severely.*] Your uncle's to home. He's waitin' to talk to you.

BENNY. Let him wait. [*In a snarling tone.*] I s'pose you've been givin' him an earful of lies about me?

HARRIET. I told him the truth, if that's what you mean. How you stole the money out of the bureau drawer—

BENNY [*alarmed but pretending scorn*]. Aw, you don't know it was me. You don't know nothin' about it.

HARRIET [*ignoring this*]. And about your disgracin' him and me with your drunken carryin's-on with that harlot, Tilly Small, night after night.

BENNY. Aw, wha'd you know about that?

HARRIET. And last but not least, the sneakin' way you're makin' a silly fool out of poor Emmer Crosby.

BENNY [*with a grin*]. You don't notice her kickin' about it, do you? [*Brusquely.*] Why don't you mind your own business, Ma?

HARRIET [*violently*]. It's a shame, that's what it is! That I should live to see the day when a son of mine'd descend so low he'd tease an old woman to get money out of her, and her alone in the world. Oh, you're low, you're low all through like your Pa was—and since you been in the army you got bold so you ain't even ashamed of your dirtiness no more!

BENNY [*in a snarling whisper*]. That's right! Blame it all on me. I s'pose she ain't got nothin' to do with it. [*With a wink.*] You oughter see her perform sometimes. You'd get wise to something then.

HARRIET. Shut up! You've got the same filthy mind your Pa had. As for Emmer, I don't hold her responsible. She's been gettin' flighty the past two years. She couldn't help it, livin' alone the way she does, shut up in this house all her life. You ought to be 'shamed to take advantage of her condition—but shame ain't in you.

BENNY. Aw, give us a rest!

HARRIET [*angrily*]. Your Uncle Caleb'll give you a rest when he sees you! Him and me's agreed not to give you another single penny if you was to get down on your knees for it. So there! You can git along on your army pay from this out.

BENNY [*worried by the finality in her tone — placatingly*]. Aw, say, Ma, what's eatin' you? What've I done that's so bad? Gosh, you oughta know some of the gang I know in the army. You'd think I was a saint if you did. [*Trying a confidential tone.*] Honest, Ma, this here thing with Aunt Emmer ain't my fault. How can I help it if she goes bugs in her old age and gets nutty about me? [*With a sly grin — in a whisper.*] Gee, Ma, you oughta see her today. She's a scream, honest! She's upstairs now gettin' calmed down. She was gettin' crazy when your callin' stopped her. Wait till she comes down and you git a look! She'll put your eye out — all dolled up like a kid of sixteen and enough paint on her mush for a Buffalo Bill Indian —

HARRIET [*staring at him with stern condemnation*]. You're a worthless loafer, Benny Rogers, same as your Pa was.

BENNY [*frustrated and furious*]. Aw, g'wan with that bunk!

[*He turns away from her.*]

HARRIET. And I'm goin' to tell Emma about you and try to put some sense back into her head.

BENNY. Go ahead. You'll get fat runnin' me down to her!

HARRIET. And if my word don't have no influence, I'll tell your Uncle Caleb everything, and get him to talk to her. She'll mind him.

BENNY [*defiantly*]. You just try it, that's all!

HARRIET. I've been scared to do more'n hint about it to him. I'm hopin' any day Emma'll come out of this foolishness, and he'll never know.

BENNY. Aw!

HARRIET. If shame was in you, you'd remember your Uncle Caleb's been in love with Emma all his life and waited for her year after year hopin' in the end she'd change her mind and marry him. And she will, too, I believe, if she comes out of this fit in her sane mind — which she won't if you keep fussin' with her.

BENNY [*with revengeful triumph*]. She'll never marry the old cuss — I'll fix that!

HARRIET. Now you're showin' yourself up for what you are! And I kin see it's come to the p'int where I got to tell your Uncle Caleb everythin' no matter how it breaks him up. I got to do it for Emmer's sake as well as his'n. We got to get her cured of your bad influence once and for all. It's the only hope for the two of 'em.

BENNY. You just try it!

HARRIET. And as for you, you get back to the army where you b'long! And don't never expect another cent from me or Caleb 'cause you won't get it! And don't never come to see us again till you've got rid of the meanness and filth that's the Rogers part of you and found the honesty and decency that's the Williams part — if you got any of me in you at all, which I begin to doubt. [*Goes to the door in rear.*] And now I'm goin' back to Caleb — and you better not let him find you here when he comes less'n you want a good hidin' for once in your life. [*She goes out.*]

BENNY [*stammering between fear and rage — shouting after her*]. G'wan! Tell him! What the hell do I care? I'll fix him! I'll spill the beans for both of you, if you try to gum me! [*He stands in the middle of the room hesitating whether to run away or stay, concentrating his thoughts on finding some way to make good his bluff. Suddenly his face lights up with a cruel grin and he mutters to himself with savage satisfaction.*] By God, that's it! I'll bet I kin work it, too! By God, that'll fix 'em! [*He chuckles and goes quickly to the door on right and calls up to the floor above.*] Emmer! Emmer!

EMMA [*her voice faintly heard answering*]. Yes, Benny, I'm coming.

BENNY [*he calls quickly*]. Come down! Come down quick!

[*He comes back to the center of the room where he stands waiting, planning his course of action.*]

EMMA [*appears in the doorway. Her face is profusely powdered — with nervous excitement*]. Benny! What's the matter? You sounded so — why where's your Ma?

BENNY. Gone. Gone back to home.

EMMA [*offendedly*]. Without waiting to see me? Why, I only sat down for a minute to give you a chance to talk to her. I was coming right down. Didn't she want to see me? Whatever's got into Harriet lately?

BENNY. She's mad as thunder at you 'cause I come over here so much 'stead of stayin' to home with her.

EMMA [*pleased*]. Oh, is that why? Well, if she ain't peculiar!

[*She sits in a rocker by the table.*]

BENNY [*with a great pretense of grief, taking one of her hands in his*]. Say, Emmer — what I called you down for was — I want to say good-by and thank you for all you've done —

EMMA [*frightenedly*]. Good-by? How you say that! What — ?

BENNY. Good-by for good this time.

EMMA. For good?

BENNY. Yep. I've got to beat it. I ain't got no home here no more. Ma and Uncle Caleb, they've chucked me out.

EMMA. Good gracious, what're you saying?

BENNY. That's what Ma come over to tell me — that Uncle Caleb'd said I'd never get another cent from him, alive or after he's dead, and she said for me to git back to the army and never to come home again.

EMMA [*gasping*]. She was only joking. She — they couldn't mean it.

BENNY. If you'd heard her you wouldn't think she was joking.

EMMA [*as he makes a movement as if to go away*]. Benny! You can't go! Go, and me never see you again, maybe! You can't! I won't have it!

BENNY. I got to, Emmer. What else is there for me to do when they've throwed me out? I don't give a damn about leaving them — but I hate to leave you and never see you again.

EMMA [*excitedly — grabbing his arm*]. You can't! I won't let you go!

BENNY. I don't want to — but what can I do?

EMMA. You can stay here with me.

BENNY [*his eyes gleaming with satisfaction*]. No, I couldn't. You know this dump of a town. Folks would be sayin' all sorts of bad things in no time. I don't care for myself. They're all down on me anyway because I'm diff'rent from small-town boobs like them and they hate me for it.

EMMA. Yes, you are diff'rent. And I'll show 'em I'm diff'rent, too. You can stay with me — and let 'em gossip all they've a mind to!

BENNY. No, it wouldn't be actin' square with you. I got to go. And I'll try to save up my pay and send you back what I've borrowed now and again.

EMMA [*more and more wrought up*]. I won't hear of no such thing. Oh, I can't understand your Ma and your Uncle Caleb bein' so cruel!

BENNY. Folks have been lyin' to her about me, like I told you, and she's told him. He's only too glad to believe it, too, long as it's bad.

EMMA. I can talk to your Uncle Caleb. He's always minded me more'n her.

BENNY [*hastily*]. Don't do that, for God's sake! You'd only make it worse and get yourself in Dutch with him, too!

EMMA [*bewilderedly*]. But — I — don't see —

BENNY [*roughly*]. Well, he's still stuck on you, ain't he?

EMMA [*with a flash of coquetry*]. Now, Benny!

BENNY. I ain't kiddin'. This is dead serious. He's stuck on you and you know it.

EMMA [*coyly*]. I haven't given him the slightest reason to hope in thirty years.

BENNY. Well, he hopes just the same. Sure he does! Why Ma said when she was here just now she'd bet you and him'd be married some day yet.

EMMA. No such thing! Why, she must be crazy!

BENNY. Oh, she ain't so crazy. Ain't he spent every durn evenin' of the time he's to home between trips over here with you — for the last thirty years?

EMMA. When I broke my engagement I said I wanted to stay friends like we'd been before, and we always have; but every time he'd even hint at bein' engaged again I'd always tell him we was friends only and he'd better leave it be that way. There's never been nothing else between us. [*With a coy smile.*] And besides, Benny, you know how little time he's had to home between viges.

BENNY. I kin remember the old cuss marchin' over here every evenin' he was to home since I was a kid.

EMMA [*with a titter of delight*]. D'you know, Benny, I do actually believe you're jealous!

BENNY [*loudly — to lend conviction*]. Sure I'm jealous! But that ain't the point just now. The point is *he's* jealous of me — and you can see what a swell chance you've got of talkin' him over now, can't you! You'd on'y make him madder.

EMMA [*embarrassedly*]. He's getting foolish. What cause has he got —

BENNY. When Ma tells him the lies about us —

EMMA [*excitedly*]. What lies?

BENNY. I ain't goin' to repeat 'em to you but you kin guess, can't you, me being so much over here?

EMMA [*springing to her feet — shocked but pleased*]. Oh!

BENNY [*turning away from her*]. And now I'm going to blow. I'll stay at Bill Grainger's tonight and get the morning train.

EMMA [*grabbing his arm*]. No such thing! You'll stay right here!

BENNY. I can't — Emmer. If you was really my aunt, things'd be diff'rent and I'd tell 'em all to go to hell.

EMMA [*smiling at him coquettishly*]. But I'm glad I ain't your aunt.

BENNY. Well, I mean if you was related to me in some way. [*At some noise he hears from without, he starts frightenedly.*] Gosh, that sounded like our front door slamming. It's him and he's coming over. I got to beat it out the back way.

[*He starts for the door on the right.*]

EMMA [*clinging to him*]. Benny! Don't go! You mustn't go!

BENNY [*inspired by alarm and desire for revenge suddenly blurts out*]. Say, let's me 'n' you git married, Emmer — tomorrow, eh? Then I kin stay! That'll stop 'em, damn 'em, and make 'em leave me alone.

EMMA [*dazed with joy*]. Married? You 'n' me? Oh, Benny, I'm too old.

[*She hides her head on his shoulder.*]

BENNY [*hurriedly, with one anxious eye on the door*]. No, you ain't! Honest, you ain't! You're the best guy in this town! [*Shaking her in his anxiety.*] Say yes, Emmer! Say you will — first thing tomorrow.

EMMA [*choking with emotion*]. Yes — I will — if I'm not too old for you.

BENNY [*jubilantly*]. Tell him. Then he'll see where he gets off! Listen! I'm goin' to beat it to the kitchen and wait. You come tell me when he's gone. [*A knock comes at the door. He whispers.*] That's him. I'm goin'.

EMMA [*embracing him fiercely*]. Oh, Benny! [*She kisses him on the lips. He ducks away from her and disappears off right. The knock is repeated.* EMMA *dabs tremblingly at her cheeks with a handkerchief. Her face is beaming with happiness and looks indescribably silly. She trips lightly to the door and opens it — forcing a light, careless tone.*] Oh, it's you, Caleb. Come right in and set. I was kind of expecting you. Benny — I'd heard you was due to home tonight.

[*He comes in and shakes the hand she holds out to him in a limp, vague, absent-minded manner. In appearance, he has changed but little in the thirty years save that his hair is now nearly white and his face more deeply lined and wrinkled. His body is still erect, strong and vigorous. He wears dark clothes, much the same as he was dressed in Act One.*]

CALEB [*mechanically*]. Hello, Emmer.

[*Once inside the door, he stands staring about the room, frowning. The garish strangeness of everything evidently repels and puzzles him. His face wears its set expression of an emotionless mask but his eyes cannot conceal an inward struggle, a baffled and painful attempt to comprehend, a wounded look of bewildered hurt.*]

EMMA [*blithely indifferent to this—pleasantly*]. Are you looking at the changes I've made? You ain't seen this room since, have you? Of course not. What am I thinking of? They only got through with the work two weeks ago. Well, what d' you think of it?

CALEB [*frowning—hesitatingly*]. Why—it's—all right, I reckon.

EMMA. It was so gloomy and old-timey before, I just couldn't bear it. Now it's light and airy and young-looking, don't you think? [*With a sigh.*] I suppose Pa and Ma turned over in their graves.

CALEB [*grimly*]. I reckon they did, too.

EMMA. Why, you don't mean to tell me you don't like it neither, Caleb? [*Then as he doesn't reply,—resentfully.*] Well, you always was a sot, old-fashioned critter, Caleb Williams, same as they was. [*She plumps herself into a rocker by the table—then, noticing the lost way in which he is looking about him.*] Gracious sakes, why don't you set, Caleb? You give me the fidgets standing that way! You ain't a stranger that's got to be invited, are you? [*Then suddenly realizing the cause of his discomfiture, she smiles pityingly, not without a trace of malice.*] Are you looking for your old chair you used to set in? Is that it? Well, I had it put up in the attic. It didn't fit in with them new things.

CALEB [*dully*]. No, I s'pose it wouldn't.

EMMA [*indicating a chair next to hers*]. Do set down and make yourself to home. [*He does so gingerly. After a pause she asks perfunctorily.*] Did you have good luck this voyage?

CALEB [*again dully*]. Oh, purty fair.

[*He begins to look at her as if he were seeing her for the first time, noting every detail with a numb, stunned astonishment.*]

EMMA. You're looking as well as ever.

CALEB [*dully*]. Oh, I ain't got nothin' to complain of.

EMMA. You're the same as me, I reckon. [*Happily.*] Why I seem to get feelin' younger and more chipper every day, I declare I do. [*She becomes uncomfortably aware of his examination—nervously.*] Land sakes, what you starin' at so?

CALEB [*brusquely blurting out his disapproval*]. You've changed, Emmer—changed so I wouldn't know you, hardly.

EMMA [*resentfully*]. Well, I hope you think it's for the best.

CALEB [*evasively*]. I ain't enough used to it yet—to tell.

EMMA [*offended*]. I ain't old-timey and old-maidy like I was, I guess that's what you mean. Well, I just got tired of mopin' alone in this house, waiting for death to take me and not enjoyin' anything. I was gettin' old before my time. And all at once, I saw what was happenin' and I made up my mind I was going to get some fun out of what Pa'd left me while I was still in the prime of life, as you might say.

CALEB [*severely*]. Be that paint and powder you got on your face, Emmer?

EMMA [*embarrassed by this direct question*]. Why, yes—I got a little mite—it's awful good for your complexion, they say—and in the cities now all the women wears it.

CALEB [*sternly*]. The kind of women I've seed in cities wearin' it— [*He checks himself and asks abruptly.*] Wa'n't your hair turnin' gray last time I was to home?

EMMA [*flustered*]. Yes—yes—so it was—but then it started to come in again black as black all of a sudden.

CALEB [*glancing at her shoes, stockings, and dress*]. You're got up in them things like a young girl goin' to a dance.

EMMA [*forcing a defiant laugh*]. Maybe I will go soon's I learn—and Benny's goin' to teach me.

CALEB [*keeping his rage in control—heavily*]. Benny—

EMMA [*suddenly bursting into hysterical tears*]. And I think it's real mean of you, Caleb, nasty mean to come here on your first night to home—and—make—fun—of—my—clothes—and everything.

[*She hides her face in her hands and sobs*].

CALEB [*overcome by remorse—forgetting his rage instantly—gets up and pats her on the shoulder—with rough tenderness*]. Thar, thar, Emmer! Don't cry, now! I didn't mean nothin'. Don't pay no 'tention to what I said. I'm a durned old fool! What the hell do I know o' women's fixin's anyhow? And I reckon I be old-fashioned and sot in my ideas.

EMMA [*reassured—pressing one of his hands gratefully*]. It hurts—hearing you say—me 'n' you such old friends and—

CALEB. Forgit it, Emmer. I won't say no more about it. [*She dries her eyes and regains her composure. He goes back to his seat, his face greatly softened, looking at her with the blind eyes of love. There is a pause. Finally, he ventures in a gentle tone.*] D'you know what time it be, Emmer?

EMMA [*puzzled*]. I don't know exactly, but there's a clock in the next room.

CALEB [*quickly*]. Hell, I don't mean that kind o' time. I mean—it was thirty years ago this spring.

EMMA [*hastily*]. Land sakes, don't let's talk of that. It only gets me thinking how old I am.

CALEB [*with an affectionate smile*]. We both got to realize now and then that we're gettin' old.

EMMA [*bridling*]. That's all right for you to say. You're twelve years older 'n me, don't forget, Caleb.

CALEB [*smiling*]. Waal, even that don't make you out no spring chicken, Emmer.

EMMA [*stiffly*]. A body's as old as they feels—and I feel right young.

CALEB. Waal, so do I as far as health goes. I'm as able and sound as ever. [*After a pause.*] But, what I meant was, d'you remember what happened thirty years back?

EMMA. I suppose I do.

CALEB. D'you remember what I said that day?

EMMA [*primly*]. You said a lot that it's better to forget, if you ask me.

CALEB. I don't mean—that part of it. I mean when I was sayin' good-by, I said—[*He gasps—then blurts it out.*] I said I'd wait thirty years—if need be. [*After a pause.*] I know you told me time and again not to go back to that. On'y—I was thinkin' all this last vige—that maybe—now when the thirty years are past—I was thinkin' that maybe—[*He looks at her humbly, imploring some encouragement. She stares straight before her, her mouth set thinly. He sighs forlornly and blunders on.*] Thirty years—that's a hell of a long time to wait, Emmer—makin' vige after vige always alone—and feelin' even more alone in between times when I was to home livin' right next door to you and callin' on you every evenin'. [*A pause.*] I've made money enough, I know—but what the hell good's that to me—long as you're out of it? [*A pause.*] Seems to me, Emmer, thirty o' the best years of a man's life ought to be proof enough to you to make you forget—that one slip o' mine.

EMMA [*rousing herself—forcing a careless tone*]. Land sakes, I forgot all about that long ago. And here you go remindin' me of it!

CALEB [*doggedly*]. You ain't answered what I was drivin' at, Emmer. [*A pause; then, as if suddenly afraid of what her answer will be, he breaks out quickly.*] And I don't want you to answer right now, neither. I want you to take time to think it all over.

EMMA [*feebly evasive*]. All right, Caleb, I'll think it over.

CALEB [*after a pause*]. Somehow—seems to me 's if—you might really *need* me now. You never did before.

EMMA [*suspiciously*]. Why should I need you now any more'n any other time?

CALEB [*embarrassedly*]. Oh, I just feel that way.

EMMA. It ain't count o' nothin' Harriet's been tellin' you, is it? [*Stiffly.*] Her 'n' me ain't such good friends no more, if you must know.

CALEB [*frowning*]. Her 'n' me nearly had a fight right before I came over here. [EMMA *starts.*] Harriet lets her tongue run away with her and says dumb fool things she don't really mean. I didn't pay much 'tention to what she was sayin'—but it riled me jest the same. She won't repeat such foolishness after the piece o' my mind I gave her.

EMMA. What did she say?

CALEB. Oh, nothin' worth tellin'. [*A pause.*] But neither you nor me ought to get mad at Harriet serious. We'd ought, by all rights, to make allowances for her. You know 's well as me what a hard time she's had. Bein' married to Alf Rogers for five years'd pizin' any woman's life.

EMMA. No, he wasn't much good, there's no denyin'.

CALEB. And now there's Benny drivin' her crazy.

EMMA [*instantly defensive*]. Benny's all right!

CALEB [*staring at her sharply—after a pause*]. No, that's jest it. He ain't all right, Emmer.

EMMA. He is, too! He's as good as gold!

CALEB [*frowning—with a trace of resentment*]. You kin say so, Emmer, but the facts won't bear you out.

EMMA [*excitedly*]. What facts, Caleb Williams? If you mean the nasty lies the folks in this town are mean enough to gossip about him, I don't believe any of 'em. I ain't such a fool.

CALEB [*bitterly*]. Then you've changed, Emmer. You didn't stop about believin' the fool stories they gossiped about me that time.

EMMA. You owned up yourself that was true!

CALEB. And Benny'd own up if he was half the man I was! [*Angrily.*] But he ain't a man noways. He's a mean skunk from truck to keelson!

EMMA [*springing to her feet*]. Oh!

CALEB [*vehemently*]. I ain't judged him by what folks have told me. But I've watched him grow up from a boy and every time I've come to home I've seed he was gittin' more 'n' more like his Pa—and you know what a low dog Alf Rogers turned out to be, and what a hell he made for Harriet. Waal, I'm sayin' this boy Benny is just Alf all over again—on'y worse!

EMMA. Oh!

CALEB. They ain't no Williams' blood left in Benny. He's a mongrel Rogers! [*Trying to calm himself a little and be convincing.*] Listen, Emmer. You don't suppose I'd be sayin' it, do you, if it wasn't so? Ain't he Harriet's boy? Ain't I brought him up in my own house since he was knee-high? Don't you know I got some feelin's 'bout it and I wouldn't hold nothing agen him less'n I knowed it was true?

EMMA [*harshly*]. Yes, you would! You're only too anxious to believe all the bad you can about him. You've always hated him, he says—and I can see it's so.

CALEB [*roughly*]. You know damned well it ain't, you mean! Ain't I talked him over with you and asked your advice about him whenever I come to home? Ain't I always aimed to do all I could to help him git on right? You know damned well I never hated him! It's him that's always hated me! [*Vengefully.*] But I'm beginning to hate him now—and I've good cause for it!

EMMA [*frightenedly*]. What cause?

CALEB [*ignoring her question*]. I seed what he was comin' to years back. Then I thought when the war come, and he was drafted into it, that the army and strict discipline'd maybe make a man o' him. But it ain't! It's made him worse! It's killed whatever mite of decency was left in him. And I reckon now that if you put a coward in one of them there uniforms, he thinks it gives him the privilege to be a bully! Put a sneak in one and it gives him the courage to be a thief! That's why when the war was over Benny enlisted again 'stead o' goin' whalin' with me. He thinks he's found

a good shield to cover up his natural-born laziness — and crookedness!

EMMA [*outraged*]. You can talk that way about him that went way over to France to shed his blood for you and me!

CALEB. I don't need no one to do my fightin' for me — against German or devil. And you know durned well he was only in the Quartermaster's Department unloadin' and truckin' groceries, as safe from a gun as you and me be this minute. [*With heavy scorn.*] If he shed any blood, he must have got a nose bleed.

EMMA. Oh, you do hate him, I can see it! And you're just as mean as mean, Caleb Williams! All you've said is a wicked lie and you've got no cause —

CALEB. I ain't, eh? I got damned good cause, I tell ye! I ain't minded his meanness to me. I ain't even give as much heed to his meanness to Harriet as I'd ought to have, maybe. But when he starts in his sneakin' thievery with you, Emmer, I put my foot down on him for good and all!

EMMA. What sneakin' thievery with me? How dare you say such things?

CALEB. I got proof it's true. Why, he's even bragged all over town about bein' able to borrow all the money from you he'd a mind to — boastin' of what an old fool he was makin' of you, with you fixin' up your house all new to git him to comin' over.

EMMA [*scarlet — blazing*]. It's a lie! He never said it! You're makin' it all up — 'cause you're — 'cause you're —

CALEB. 'Cause I'm what, Emmer?

EMMA [RINGING *it at him like a savage taunt*]. 'Cause you're jealous of him, that's what! Any fool can see that!

CALEB [*getting to his feet and facing her — slowly*]. Jealous? Of Benny? How — I don't see your meanin' rightly.

EMMA [*with triumphant malice*]. Yes, you do! Don't pretend you don't! You're jealous 'cause you know I care a lot about him.

CALEB [*slowly*]. Why would I be jealous 'count o' that? What kind o' man d'you take me for? Don't I know you must care for him when you've been a'most as much a mother to him for years as Harriet was?

EMMA [*wounded to the quick — furiously*]. No such thing! You're a mean liar! I ain't never played a mother to him. He's never looked at me that way — never! And I don't care for him that way at all. Just because I'm a mite older 'n him — can't them things happen just as well as any other — what d'you suppose — can't I care for him same as any woman cares for a man? And I do! I care more'n I ever did for you! And that's why you're lying about him! You're jealous of that!

CALEB [*staring at her with stunned eyes — in a hoarse whisper*]. Emmer! Ye don't know what you're sayin', do ye?

EMMA. I do too!

CALEB. Harriet said you'd been actin' out o' your right senses.

EMMA. Harriet's mad because she knows Benny loves me better 'n her. And he does love me! He don't mind my bein' older. He's said so! And I love him, too!

CALEB [*stepping back from her in horror*]. Emmer!

EMMA. And he's asked me to marry him tomorrow. And I'm going to! Then you can all lie all you've a mind to!

CALEB. You're — going to — marry Benny?

EMMA. First thing tomorrow. And since you've throwed him out of his house in your mad jealousness, I've told him he can stay here with me tonight. And he's going to!

CALEB [*his fists clenching — tensely*]. Where — where is the skunk now?

EMMA [*hastily*]. Oh, he ain't here. He's gone up street.

CALEB [*starting for the door in rear*]. I'm goin' to find the skunk.

EMMA [*seizing his arms — frightenedly*]. What're you going to do?

CALEB [*between his clenched teeth*]. I don't know, Emmer — I don't know — On'y he ain't goin' to marry you, by God!

EMMA. Caleb! [*She tries to throw*

her arms about him to stop his going. He pushes her firmly but gently aside. She shrieks.] Caleb! [*She flings herself on her knees and wraps her arms around his legs in supplicating terror.*] Caleb! You ain't going to kill him, Caleb? You ain't going to hurt him, be you? Say you ain't! Tell me you won't hurt him! [*As she thinks she sees a relenting softness come into his face as he looks down at her.*] Oh, Caleb, you used to say you loved me! Don't hurt him then, Caleb,—for my sake! I love him, Caleb! Don't hurt him—just because you think I'm an old woman ain't no reason—and I won't marry you, Caleb. I won't—not even if you have waited thirty years. I don't love you. I love him! And I'm going to marry him—tomorrow. So you won't hurt him, will you, Caleb—not when I ask you on my knees!

CALEB [*breaking away from her with a shudder of disgust*]. No, I won't touch him. If I was wantin' to git even with ye, I wouldn't dirty my hands on him. I'd let you marry the skunk and set and watch what happened—or else I'd offer him money not to marry ye—more money than the little mite you kin bring him—and let ye see how quick he'd turn his back on ye!

EMMA [*getting to her feet—frenziedly*]. It's a lie! He never would!

CALEB [*unheeding—with a sudden ominous calm*]. But I ain't goin' to do neither. You ain't worth it—and he ain't—and no one ain't, nor nothin'. Folks be all crazy and rotten to the core and I'm done with the whole kit and caboodle of 'em. I kin only see one course out for me and I'm goin' to take it. "A dead whale or a stove boat!" we says in whalin'—and my boat is stove! [*He strides away from her, stops, and turns back—savagely.*] Thirty o' the best years of my life flung for a yeller dog like him to feed on. God! You used to say you was diff'rent from the rest o' folks. By God, if you are, it's just you're a mite madder'n they be! By God, that's all!

[*He goes, letting the door slam behind him.*]

EMMA [*in a pitiful whimper*]. Caleb! [*She sinks into a chair by the table sobbing hysterically. Benny sneaks through the door on right, hesitates for a while, afraid that his uncle may be coming back.*]

BENNY [*finally, in a shrill whisper*]. Aunt Emmer!

EMMA [*raising her face to look at him for a second*]. Oh, Benny!

[*She falls to weeping again.*]

BENNY. Say, you don't think he's liable to come back, do you?

EMMA. No—he'll—never come back here—no more.

[*Sobs bitterly.*]

BENNY [*his courage returning, comes forward into the room*]. Say, he's way up in the air, ain't he? [*With a grin.*] Say, that was some ballin' out he give you!

EMMA. You—you heard what he said?

BENNY. Sure thing. When you got to shoutin' I sneaked out o' the kitchen into there to hear what was goin' on. [*With a complacent grin.*] Say, you certainly stood up for me all right. You're a good old scout at that, d'you know it?

EMMA [*raising her absurd, besmeared face to his, as if expecting him to kiss her*]. Oh, Benny, I'm giving up everything I've held dear all my life for your sake.

BENNY [*turning away from her with a look of aversion*]. Well, what about it? Ain't I worth it? Ain't I worth a million played-out old cranks like him? [*She stares at him bewilderedly. He takes a handful of almonds from his pocket and begins cracking and eating them, throwing the shells on the floor with an impudent carelessness.*] Hope you don't mind my havin' a feed? I found them out in the kitchen and helped myself.

EMMA [*pitifully*]. You're welcome to anything that's here, Benny.

BENNY [*insolently*]. Sure, I know you're a good scout. Don't rub it in. [*After a pause—boastfully.*] Where did you get that stuff about askin' him not to hurt me? He'd have a swell

chance! There's lot of hard guys in the army have tried to get funny with me till I put one over on 'em. I'd like to see him start something! I could lick him with my hands handcuffed.

EMMA [*revolted*]. Oh!

BENNY [*resentfully*]. Think I'm bluffin'? I'll show you sometime. [*He swaggers about the room — finally stopping beside her. With a cunning leer.*] Say, I been thinkin' it over and I guess I'll call his bluff.

EMMA [*confusedly*]. What — do you mean?

BENNY. I mean what he said just before he beat it — that he could get me not to marry you if he offered me more coin than you got. [*Very interestedly.*] Say, d'you s'pose the old miser really was serious about that?

EMMA [*dazedly — as if she could not realize the significance of his words.*] I — I — don't know, Benny.

BENNY [*swaggering about again*]. If I was only sure he wasn't stallin'! If I could get the old cuss to shell out that way! [*With a tickled chuckle.*] Gosh, that'd be the real stunt aw right, aw right. Oui, oui! Maybe he wasn't kiddin' at that, the old simp! It's worth takin' a stab at, damned if it ain't. I ain't got nothin' to lose.

EMMA [*frightenedly*]. What — what're you talkin' about, Benny?

BENNY. Say, I think I'll go over and talk to Ma after a while. You can go over first to make sure he ain't there. I'll get her to put it up to him straight. If he's willin' to dig in his jeans for some real coin — real dough, this time! — I'll agree to beat it and not spill the beans for him with you. [*Threateningly.*] And if he's too tight, I'll go right through with what I said I would, if only to spite him! That's me!

EMMA. You mean — if he's willing to bribe you with money, you won't marry me tomorrow?

BENNY. Sure! If he'll put up enough money. I won't stand for no pikin'.

EMMA [*whimpering*]. Oh, Benny, you're only jokin', ain't you? You can't — you can't mean it!

BENNY [*with careless effrontery*]. Why can't I? Sure I mean it!

EMMA [*hiding her face in her hands — with a tortured moan*]. Oh, Benny!

BENNY [*disgustedly*]. Aw, don't go ballin'! [*After a pause — a bit embarrassedly*]. Aw, say, what d'you think, anyway? What're you takin' it so damned serious for — me askin' you to marry me, I mean? I was on'y sort of kiddin' anyway — just so you'd tell him and get his goat right. [*As she looks up at him with agonized despair. With a trace of something like pity showing in his tone.*] Say, honest, Aunt Emmer, you didn't believe — you didn't think I was really stuck on you, did you? Ah, say, how could I? Have a heart! Why, you're as old as Ma is, ain't you, Aunt Emmer? [*He adds ruthlessly.*] And I'll say you look it, too!

EMMA [*cowering — as if he had struck her*]. Oh! Oh!

BENNY [*a bit irritated*]. What's the use of blubberin' for God's sake? Can't you take it like a sport? Hell, I ain't lookin' to marry no one, if I can help it. What do I want a wife for? There's too many others. [*After a pause — as she still sobs — calculatingly.*] Aw, come on, be a sport — and say, listen, if he ain't willin' to come across, I'll marry you all right, honest I will. [*More and more calculatingly.*] Sure! If they mean that stuff about kickin' me out of home — sure I'll stay here with you! I'll do anything you want. If you want me to marry you, all you've got to do is say so — any time! Only not tomorrow, we'd better wait and see —

EMMA [*hysterically*]. Oh, go away! Go away!

BENNY [*looking down at her disgustedly*]. Aw, come up for air, can't you? [*He slaps her on the back.*] Buck up! Be a pal! Tell me what your dope is. This thing's got me so balled up I don't know how I stand. [*With a sudden fury.*] Damn his hide! I'll bet he'll go and leave all he's got to some lousy orphan asylum now.

EMMA. Oh, go away! Go away!

BENNY [*viciously*]. So you're givin' me the gate, too, eh? I'd like to see

you try it! You asked me to stay and I'll stick. It's all your fool fault that's got me in wrong. And now you want to shake me! This is what I get for foolin' around with an old hen like you that oughta been planted in the cemetery long ago! Paintin' your old mush and dressin' like a kid! Christ A'mighty!

EMMA [*in a cry of despair*]. Don't! Stop! Go away.

BENNY [*suddenly alert — sharply*]. Sh! I hear someone coming. [*Shaking her.*] Stop — now, Emmer! Damn it, you gotta go to the door. Maybe it's him.

[*He scurries into the room on right. There is a faint knock at the door.* EMMA *lifts her head. She looks horribly old and worn out. Her face is frozen into an expressionless mask, her eyes are red-rimmed, dull and lifeless. The knock is repeated more sharply.* EMMA *rises like a weary automaton and goes to the door and opens it.* HARRIET *is revealed standing outside.*]

HARRIET [*making no movement to come in — coldly*]. I want to speak to Caleb.

EMMA [*dully*]. He ain't here. He left a while back — said he was goin' up street — I think.

HARRIET [*worriedly*]. Oh, land sakes! [*Then hostilely.*] Do you know where Benny is?

EMMA [*dully*]. Yes, he's here.

HARRIET [*contemptuously*]. I might have guessed that! [*Icily formal.*] Would you mind tellin' him I want to see him?

EMMA [*turns and calls*]. Benny! Here's your Ma!

BENNY [*comes from the next room*]. Aw right. [*In a fierce whisper as he passes* EMMA.] What d'you tell her I was here for, you old fool?

EMMA [*gives no sign of having heard him but comes back to her chair and sits down.* BENNY *slouches to the door — sullenly*]. What d'you want, Ma?

HARRIET [*coldly*]. I wanted your Uncle Caleb, not you, but you'll have to do, bein' the only man about.

BENNY [*suspiciously*]. What is it?

HARRIET [*a bit frightenedly*]. I just heard a lot of queer noises down to the barn. Someone's in there, Benny, sure as I'm alive. They're stealin' the chickens, must be.

BENNY [*carelessly*]. It's only the rats.

HARRIET [*angrily*]. Don't play the idiot! This was a big thumpin' noise no rat'd make.

BENNY. What'd any guy go stealin' this early — [*As* HARRIET *turns away angrily — placatingly.*] Aw right, I'm coming. I'll have a look if that'll satisfy you. Don't go gettin' sore at me again.

[*While he is speaking he goes out and disappears after his mother.* EMMA *sits straight and stiff in her chair for a while, staring before her with waxy eyes. Then she gets to her feet and goes from window to window taking down all the curtains with quick mechanical movements. She throws them on a pile in the middle of the floor. She lifts down the framed pictures from the walls and piles them on the curtains. She takes the cushions and throws them on; pushes the rugs to the pile with her feet; sweeps everything off the table onto the floor. She does all this without a trace of change in her expression — rapidly, but with no apparent effort. There is the noise of running footsteps from outside and* BENNY *bursts into the room panting for breath. He is terribly excited and badly frightened.*]

BENNY [*stops short as he sees the pile on the floor*]. What the hell —

EMMA [*dully*]. The junk man's coming for them in the morning.

BENNY [*too excited to be surprised*]. To hell with that! Say, listen Aunt Emmer, he's hung himself — Uncle Caleb — in the barn — he's dead!

EMMA [*slowly letting the words fall — like a beginner on the typewriter touching two new letters*]. Caleb — dead!

BENNY [*voluble now*]. Dead as a door nail! Neck's busted. I just cut him down and carried him to home. Say, you've got to come over and help look after Ma. She's goin' bugs. I can't do nothin' with her.

EMMA [*as before*]. Caleb hanged himself — in the barn?

BENNY. Yes — and made a sure job of it. [*With morbid interest in the details.*] He got a halter and made a noose of the rope for his neck and climbed up in the loft and hitched the leather end to a beam and then let himself drop. He must have kicked in that quick! [*He snaps his fingers — then urgently.*] Say, come on. Come on over 'n' help me with Ma, can't you? She's goin' wild. I can't do nothin'!

EMMA [*vaguely*]. I'll be over — in a minute. [*Then with a sudden air of having decided something irrevocably*]. I got to go down to the barn.

BENNY. Barn? Say, are you crazy? He ain't there now. I told you I carried him home.

EMMA. I mean — my barn. I got to go down —

BENNY [*exasperated*]. Oh hell! You're as bad as Ma! Everyone's lost their heads but me. Well, I got to get someone else, that's all.

[*He rushes out rear, slamming the door behind him.*]

EMMA [*after a tense pause — with a sudden outburst of wild grief*]. Caleb! [*Then in a strange whisper.*] Wait, Caleb, I'm going down to the barn. [*She moves like a sleepwalker toward the door in the rear as*

[THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

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Other plays of similar character:

Strange Interlude (Eugene O'Neill)
The Silver Cord (Sidney Howard)
Countess Julie (August Strindberg)

QUESTIONS ON "DIFF'RENT"

1. Contrast the appearance of the Crosby parlor in 1890 and in 1920. What do the changes signify?

2. Contrast Emma's moral scruples and prejudices in act one and in act two. What has happened?

3. Does the long interval of time between acts seriously affect the artistic unity of the play?

4. Criticize the ending of the play.

5. Does *Diff'rent* have any general tragic significance, or are the characters "special cases"?

6. How does O'Neill give occasional relief from the tragic tenseness?

GLOSSARY OF DRAMATIC TERMS

Aside: word or words which are spoken by a character in the presence of other characters on the stage, but which are heard only by the audience.

Catastrophe: The fatal conclusion, near the end of the play, to the series of incidents composing the main plot. (The death of Macbeth.)

Classic drama: Drama composed according to strict rules supposed to have been followed by Greek and Latin dramatists. It observes faithfully the three unities (q. v.).

Climax: Point usually near the middle of the play where a marked change in the fortunes of the protagonist begins. (The escape of Fleance in *Macbeth,* the first reverse Macbeth suffers in covering up his crimes.)

Closet drama: A play of literary merit, usually in verse, popularly supposed to have been written to be read and not to be staged. It is doubtful, however, if any author ever wrote a play with such an idea in mind. The plays of Browning and Tennyson, for example, are erroneously called closet dramas, for the poets intended that they be staged.

Coincidence: A striking combination of events — seemingly fortuitous — which aggravates or solves plot difficulties.

Comedy: A play, light in mood, in which the protagonist (or protagonists) are successful in his (or their) conflict against fate, or character, or whatever brings about the dramatic situation.

Confidant: A traditional stage figure, usually a friend or servant of the protagonist, whose sole *raison d'être* is to be talked to. The confidant offers an escape from the soliloquy.

Dénouement: French word meaning, literally, to untie a knot. In drama, the unraveling of the plot or story.

Deus ex machina: The bringing in, near the end of the play, of some unexpected or unprepared-for element to solve plot difficulties.

Didacticism: Strong emphasis — external rather than internal — on some moral teaching of the play. *Macbeth* is not didactic, since the moral teaching is inherent in the theme and story. *The Enemy* (by Channing Pollack) is didactic, since the principal purpose of the play is to prove a thesis.

Dramatic and theatrical: A dramatic situation, speech, gesture, etc., is genuinely expressive and striking; a theatrical situation, etc., is unconvincing, forced, artificial, exaggerated. In *Mrs. Dane's Defence* when Mrs. Dane reveals her identity to Sir Daniel, the scene is dramatic; in *She Stoops to Conquer* after Mrs. Hardcastle has just expressed fears over the dangerous situation of Tony's lungs, Tony is heard "halloing behind the scenes." Here the effect is merely theatrical.

Dramatic irony: Speeches or remarks which to the audience have an added significance or application unknown to the speaker. The "honest Iago" of Othello.

Epigram: A terse witticism, detachable from the context, often antithetical in nature. "If a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes in her." (Wilde.)

Exposition: Giving early in the play enough knowledge of time, place, characters, and situation to enable the audience to follow the story.

Farce: Form of comedy in which the interest and entertainment result principally from a series of amusing situations. The emphasis rests on incident rather than on character. (*The Importance of Being Earnest,* by Oscar Wilde.)

High Comedy: Same as comedy of manners. A comic play that "deals with life sincerely and satirically, without exaggerated caricature in the character drawing, and without exaggerated fun making in the episodes." (Brander Matthews.) It usually contains witty repartee, and appeals to the mind rather than to the emotions. (Sherwood's *The Road to Rome.*)

Low comedy: Closely akin to farce. Usually the characters are uneducated and blundering, and the comedy situations are of the grossest nature.

Melodrama: A serious, romantic play in which the primary emphasis is placed on incident and situation rather than on character. The incidents are sensational in nature, and the situations are often far-fetched. (*The Trial of Mary Dugan,* by Veiller.)

Plot: The story or series of connected events in which the characters of the play are involved.

Poetic justice: The rule that a dramatist must prove that virtue is always rewarded and that vice is always punished. The rule is generally ignored in modern literary drama.

Protagonist: The leading character in a drama; the character around whom the plot revolves and the interest centers.

Realism: The attempt to present scene and character as they actually are in real life, without resorting to idealization. *The Show-Off,* termed by George Kelly, its author, a "transcript of life," is a successful realistic play.

Satire: The holding up to ridicule of certain foibles, weaknesses, or vices of society or man. (Ben Jonson's *Volpone* satirizes man's avarice and hypocrisy.)

Social drama: Play dealing with a problem or problems of modern life and contemporary interest.

Soliloquy: Word or words spoken by a character when alone on the stage.

Theatricality: Stagey device — *coup de théatre* — such as concealment, eavesdropping, stolen documents, disguise, rhetorical outbursts not in keeping with the character, etc.

Tragedy: A serious play in which the protagonist is unsuccessful in his conflict against fate, or character, or whatever force brings about the dramatic situation. A tragedy usually, though not always, ends in the death of the protagonist.

Unity of action: Aristotle's rule that a tragedy must have but a single subject "whole and complete in itself, with a beginning, middle, and an end." Aristotle would, therefore, condemn a mixture of comedy and tragedy such as O'Casey puts into *Juno and the Paycock.*

Unity of place: The demand of the classicists that there be no change of scene in the drama.

Unity of time: The demand of the classicists that the action of the play shall not cover a period of more than twenty-four hours.

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